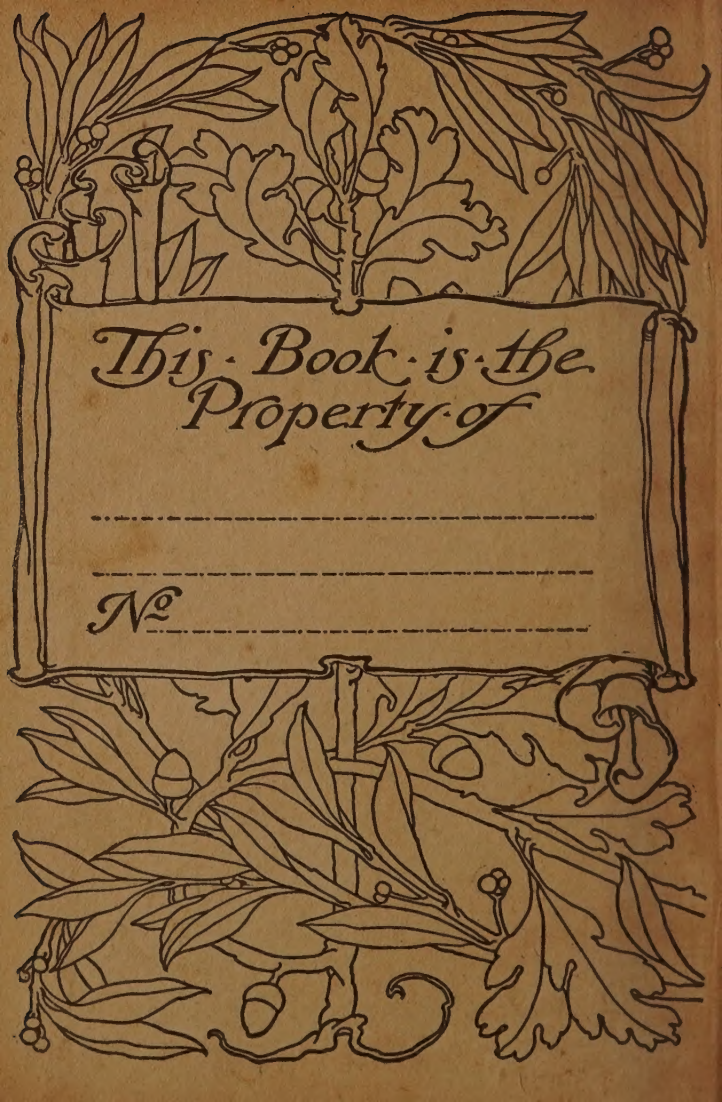
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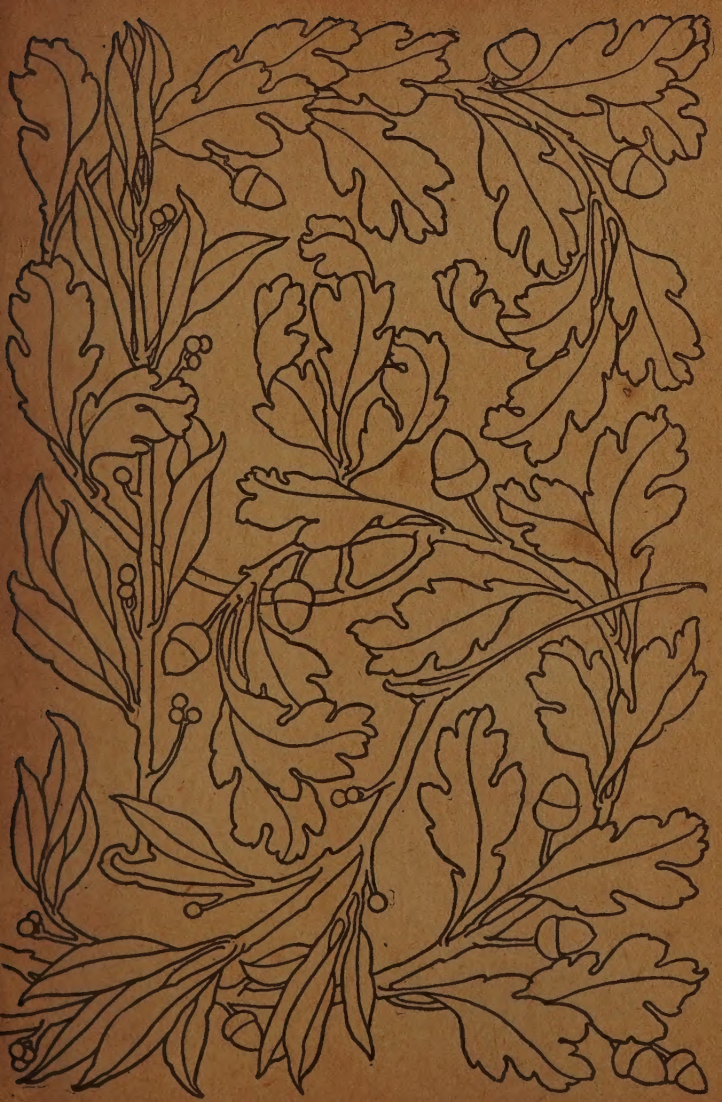

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WILD KITTY

WILD KITTY

A STORY OF MIDDLETON SCHOOL

BY

L. T. MEADE

Author of "Polly," "A Sweet Girl Graduate,"
"Daddy's Girl," "The School Queens,"
"A Girl from America," etc.

NEW YORK
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BIOGRAPHY AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

L. T. MEADE (Mrs. Elizabeth Thomasina Smith), English novelist, was born at Bandon, County Cork, Ireland, 1854, the daughter of Rev. R. T. Meade, Rector of Novohal, County Cork, and married Toulmin Smith in 1879. She wrote her first book, *Lettie's Last Home*, at the age of seventeen and since then has been an unusually prolific writer, her stories attaining wide popularity on both sides of the Atlantic.

She worked in the British Museum, living in Bishopsgate Without, making special studies of East London life which she incorporated in her stories. She edited *Atlanta* for six years. Her pictures of girls, especially in the influence they exert on their elders, are drawn with intuitive fidelity; pathos, love, and humor, as in *Daddy's Girl*, flowing easily from her pen. She has traveled extensively, being devoted to motoring and other outdoor sports.

Among more than fifty novels she has written, dealing largely with questions of home life, are: *David's Little Lad; Great St. Benedict's; A Knight of To-day* (1877); *Miss Toosey's Mission; Bel-Marjory* (1878); *Laddie; Outcast Robbin: or, Your Brother and Mine; A Cry from the Great City; White Lillie and Other Tales; Scamp and I; The Floating Light of Ringfinnan; Dot and Her Treasures; The Children's Kingdom: the Story of Great Endeavor; The Water Gipsies; A Dweller in Tents; Andrew Harvey's Wife; Mou-setse: A Negro Hero* (1880); *Mother Herring's Chickens* (1881); *A London Baby: the Story of King Roy* (1883); *Hermie's Rose-Buds and Other Stories; How it all Came Round; Two Sisters* (1884); *Autocrat of the Nursery; Tip Cat; Scarlet Anemones; The Band of Three; A Little Silver Trumpet; Our Little Ann; The Angel of Love* (1885); *A World of Girls* (1886); *Beforehand; Daddy's Boy; The O'Donnells of Inchfawn; The Palace Beautiful; Sweet Nancy* (1887); *Deb and the Duchess* (1888); *Nobody's Neighbors; Pen* (1888); *A Girl from America* (1907).

WILD KITTY

CHAPTER I.

BESSIE, ALICE, GWIN, ELMA.

"BESSIE! Bessie!"

"Yes, mother," replied Bessie Challoner.

"You'll be late for school, child, if you are not quick."

"Bessie!" shouted her father at the top of his voice from below stairs. "Bessie; late as usual."

"I am really going, father; I am just ready," was the eager reply. Bessie caught up her sailor hat, shoved it carelessly over her mass of thick hair, and searched frantically round her untidy bedroom for the string bag which contained her schoolbooks.

"Oh, Bessie, you'll get into a scrape," said Judy, one of her younger sisters, dancing into the room. "Why, you are late. I hear the schoolbell ringing; it will stop in a moment."

"Don't worry me, Judy," cried Bessie. "Do you know where my bag is?"

Judy ran into the middle of the room, turned round, and began to laugh ecstatically. "Do you know where it is, you little good-for-nothing? Have you put it in hiding?"

"Yes, yes, yes," screamed the child, jumping up and down in her joy.

"Then, if you don't give it to me at once, I'll——"

But Judy had dodged her and was out of the room. Up to the attic flew the child, and after her dashed Bessie. The bag was found in the corner of the linen-cupboard. Bessie aimed a frenzied blow at Judy, who once again dodged her, then the schoolgirl ran downstairs and was out of the house.

"Bessie, for shame!" said her brother, who was standing smoking his cigarette in a very lazy manner in the garden. "Why, you'll never get full marks."

"Don't," said Bessie. "I feel quite hunted between you all."

She had got on the highroad now, and could walk away in peace. She was a tall girl, somewhat bony-looking at present, with a face which showed abundance of intellect, large dreamy eyes, a wide mouth, a flat nose, a long chin. Bessie was certainly not at all a pretty girl; but, notwithstanding this fact, there were few of all the pupils at Middleton School who approached her in popularity. She was clever without being a scrap conceited, and was extremely good-natured, doing her work for the pleasure of doing it and not because she wanted

to outstrip a schoolfellow. She was conscientious too, and would have scorned to do a mean or shabby thing; but she was hopelessly untidy, careless to a fault, late for school half her days, getting into countless scrapes and getting out of them as best she could—the butt of her class as well as the favorite, always true to herself and indifferent to the censures or the praise of her fellow-creatures.

"Well, Bess, is that you? Do wait for me," called out a panting voice in the distance.

Late as she was, Bessie stopped. It was never her way to leave a fellow-creature in the lurch.

A girl with dancing eyes and rosy cheeks came panting and puffing round the corner.

"I just caught a sight of the red ribbon with which you tie your hair," she said. "I am so glad you are late; I am too, and I am quite ashamed of myself."

"Why in the world should you be ashamed of yourself, Alice?" asked Bessie. "I don't suppose you meant to be late."

"Of course not; but I shall lose my mark for punctuality; and you know, Bessie, I am feverishly anxious to get a move, and to—to win the scholarship at the midsummer break-up."

Bessie yawned slightly.

"Come on, Alice," she said; "I am disgracefully late as usual, and we need not make matters worse. I suppose we must wait in the hall now until prayers are over."

"It's too bad," said Alice. "I'll tell you afterward how it happened, Bessie. I am glad you waited for me. They always scold you so much for being late that they will not take so much notice of me. May I slip into my place from behind you?"

"If you like," said Bessie.

They entered the great schoolhouse, turned down a long corridor, deposited their hats and jackets on the pegs provided for the purpose, and went into the schoolroom just when the pupils were filing into their different classes.

Both girls had marks against their names for unpunctuality. Alice frowned and fidgeted, turned scarlet, glanced nervously at her fellow-pupils, but Bessie took the matter with her wonted calm. Soon she forgot all about it. She became absorbed in her different studies, each one of which she had prepared with extreme attention. As she answered question after question her great, full, dreamy eyes seemed to lighten with hidden fire, her face lost its plainness, the intellect in it transformed it. One or two other girls in the class watched her with a slight degree of envy.

Bessie was very high up in the school. As usual she quickly rose to the head of the form; this position she kept without the slightest difficulty during lesson after lesson.

Alice, muddled already by that mark for unpunctuality, got through her work badly; as Bessie rose in the class Alice went down. At the end of the morning's work the two girls were as far as the poles asunder.

"I can't think how you do it," said Alice, coming up to Bessie during recess, and linking her hand through her arm. "You never seem to mind disgrace at all."

"Of course I mind disgrace," answered Bessie. "Come out into the playground, won't you, Alice? We can't talk in here."

They went out and began pacing up and down the wide quadrangle devoted to the purpose. Other girls passed them two and two, each girl talking to her special companion.

"How very handsome Gwin Harley looks this morning," said Alice, pausing in her grumbling to gaze at a slender and lovely girl who passed them, walking with another dark-eyed, somewhat plain girl of the name of Elma Lewis.

"I wish she was not such friends with Elma," said Bessie. "I like Gwin very much indeed; I suppose everyone in the school does."

"Catch Elma not making up to her," said Alice. "Why, you know Gwin is as rich as ever she can be; she has a pony-carriage of her own. I cannot make out why she comes to Middleton School."

"Because it is the best school in the neighborhood," said Bessie somewhat proudly. "It is not a question of money, nor of anything but simply of learning; we learn better at Middleton School than anywhere else; there are better teachers and——"

"But such a rum lot of girls," said Alice. "Of course we all go in sets, and our set is quite the nicest in the school; but all the same, I wonder a rich man like Mr. Harley allows Gwin to come here."

Gwin and Elma drew up at that moment in front of the other two.

"Bessie," said Gwin, "I saw you carrying everything before you this morning. But," she added hastily, "that is neither here nor there. I shall never be a great learned genius like you, but I shall admire geniuses all the same. Now, I want to say that Elma is coming to tea with me this afternoon, and will you both come as well? We have a good deal to talk over."

Bessie's face lightened.

"I should like it very much indeed," she said; "but you know I must get through my studies first."

"Oh, you won't take long over them."

"Yes, but I shall," answered Bessie; "there is a very stiff piece of German to translate this afternoon. I can manage French and mathematics of course, and——"

"Oh, don't begin to rehearse your different studies," said Gwin, holding up her hand in a warning attitude. "I don't care in the least what you learn, Bessie; I want you to come. Because," she added, "you are such an honest creature."

"Why should not I be honest?" said Bessie, opening her eyes wide. "I have never had any temptation to be anything else."

"My dear Bessie, you are too painfully matter-of-fact,"

said Elma. "Gwin meant that your nature is transparent—it is a beautiful trait in any character."

"Well, Bessie, will you come or will you not?" interrupted Gwin.

"Yes, I'll come. I'll manage it somehow," said Bessie. "I can't resist the temptation."

"And you too, Alice?" said Gwin, turning to Alice Denvers, who was watching Bessie with envious eyes.

"I don't suppose mother will let me. I am ever so vexed," said Alice.

"But why not, dear; you have nothing special to do to-day?"

"Well, I had a bad mark for unpunctuality, and——"

"What does that signify?"

"But listen; I have gone down several places in class. Father and mother are so particular; they seem to think my whole future life depends upon my position in school. Of course I know we are not very rich, like you—" Here she flushed and hesitated.

Gwin Harley flushed also.

"When you talk like that," she said, "I feel quite ashamed of being well off. I often long to be poor like—like dear little Elma here." As she spoke she patted her somewhat squat little companion on her arm. "But never mind, girls; I am not one of those who intend to throw away all my money; that is one reason why I want to have a good talk this afternoon. You must come, Alice; you simply must."

"But there is another reason," said Alice. "Kitty Malone is coming to-day."

"Kitty Malone! Who in the name of fortune is she?"

"Oh, a wild Irish girl."

"Truly wild, I should think, with that name. 'Kitty Malone, ohone!' I seem to hear the refrain somewhere now. Isn't there a song called 'Kitty Malone'?"

"There is a song called 'The Widow Malone,'" said Bessie; "don't you know it? You read all about it in 'Harry Lorrequer.'"

"But who is Kitty Malone, Alice?"

"I say a wild Irish girl."

"And what has she got to do with you?"

"She is coming to board with us. She is going to join the school, and mother is to have the charge of her. A precious bore I shall find it."

"When did you say she was coming?" asked Gwin eagerly.

"I expect she is at home by now; she was to arrive this morning."

"Delightful!" said Gwin, clapping her hands, "she shall come too. I want beyond anything to become acquainted with a real aborigine, and of course any girl called Kitty Malone hailing from the sister-isle must belong to that species. Bring the wild Irish girl with you by all means, Alice; and now, as you have no manner of excuse, I'll say

ta-ta for the present." She kissed her pretty hand lightly to the two girls, and went on her way, once more accompanied by her faithful satellite, Elma.

"Isn't she fascinating?" said Alice; "aren't you quite in love with her, Bessie?"

"Dear me, no," answered Bessie Challoner. "I never fall in love in that sort of headlong fashion; but all the same," she added, "I admire Gwin very much, only I do wish she would not take up with Elma."

"So do I," said Alice.

"It was very kind of her to ask us," continued Bessie, "and I for one shall be delighted to go. I have not the least doubt that in a big house of that sort they have 'Household Encyclopedia,' and I want to look up the article on magnetic iron ore."

"Oh, what in the world for?" cried Alice.

"I am interested in magnets, and—but there, Alice, why should I worry you with the sort of things that delight me. I am going, and that is all right. You will be sure to come too; won't you, Alice?"

"Yes, I must manage it somehow; and as Gwin has asked Kitty Malone it won't make it quite so difficult. I know mother would not let me leave Kitty this afternoon, for it is, from the money point of view, a great thing for us her coming. Her people are quite well off, although they are Irish. They live in an old castle on the coast of Donegal, and Kitty has never been out of the country in which she was born. They are paying mother very well to receive her, and mother is ever so pleased. Of course it's horrid for me, for she will be my companion morning, noon, and night; we are even to sleep in the same room. It was that that made me late for school this morning, and got me that horrid, horrid, mark for unpunctuality."

"But why? I don't understand," said Bessie.

"Well, you see, I put it off until the last minute. I know it was all my fault; but I would not empty the cupboard in the corner of the room, although mother told me to do so at intervals for the past week. Well, mother came in this morning and found it chock full—you know the sort of thing, full to bursting, so that the door wouldn't shut—and she said that I should empty it before I went to school. I told her I should be late, and mother said it was a just punishment for me. Didn't I bless Kitty Malone! But of course I set to work, and I scrambled out the things somehow. Of course I am in hot water, and father is so terribly particular; but I will try and come. Yes, I'll try and come, and I'll bring Kitty."

"Very well; if you are going we may as well go together," said Bessie. "Gwin never mentioned the hour she had tea; but I suppose if we are at Harley Grove by five o'clock it will do."

"Yes, I should think so," said Alice in a dubious voice. "It

it a pity she did not mention the hour. There she is still hobnobbing with Elma. I'll just run across the quadrangle and ask her."

Alice left her companion, obtained the necessary information from Gwin, and came back again. "She says if we are with her sharp at five it will do quite well, and we are to stay until nine o'clock, then we can all go home together."

"Delicious!" said Bessie. "I love being out late. I hope there will be a moon, and that there won't be many clouds in the sky, for I want to examine the position of some of the planets. Did I tell you, Alice, that Uncle John has a telescope through which I can see the asteroids?"

"What on earth are they?" cried Alice, yawning as she spoke.

"Oh, the very small planets."

"Then, my dear, I hope you will see them. But really, Bessie, I can't run around nature as you do—your intellect is quite overpowering; one moment you want to get up information with regard to magnetic iron ore, and the next you confound me with some awful observation about asteroids. Good-by, Bessie; good-by. I shall be late for dinner, and then no chance of going to the fair Gwin's this afternoon."

"Well, if you do go, call for me," shouted Bessie after her; "I'll wait for you until half past four, then I'll start off by myself."

"Yes, yes, I'll come if I can, and bring Kitty also if I can."

"Be sure you don't fail. I'll look out for you."

Alice put wings to her feet and set off running down the dusty road, and Bessie more soberly returned home.

CHAPTER II.

THE BLARNEY STONE.

ALICE'S home was nearly half a mile from the school. It was a big, commonplace suburban house standing at a corner. It had a small garden in front and a larger one at the back; but neither at front nor back were the gardens tidily kept. They were downtrodden by the constant pressure of many feet, and were further ornamented at intervals by sheds and kennels, for Fred and Philip Denvers were devoted to all sorts of pets; there was also a rabbit-run at one end, and a little railed-off place where Mrs. Denvers tried to keep fowls.

Alice at intervals had sighed for a tennis lawn; but whenever she dared to mention the idea she was hooted by her big brothers, who did not want the garden to be made in the least bit, as they expressed it, ornamental.

"But tennis isn't ornamental!" said Alice.

"Beastly game," remarked Fred. "Only meant for girls; just to give them an opportunity of hobnobbing together, and talking gossip, and making up mischief."

"You talk in the most ridiculous, unfair way," said Alice in indignation; but she did not dare to mention the subject of the tennis court again, and the boys still continued to build fresh sheds and introduce new animals.

On this occasion, as Alice walked up to the house, she was met by Fred, who ran out to meet her in some excitement.

"I say, Alice," he cried, "she's come, and she is a rum 'un!"

"Who has come?" asked Alice; "not—not Kitty Malone?"

"No one else, at your service, Kitty Malone, ohone!" cried Fred. "And oh! isn't she Irish! You come along and see her. I never saw anything like her before."

"Why, Fred, I didn't think you cared for girls."

"Nor do I as a rule, but this one—oh! I say she is a jolly sort. Why she's been down in the kitchen and up in the attics—she knows every one in the house already; and do you know what she is doing now—sitting in the drawing-room with the window wide open, grinning down at you, and she has got Pointer in her arms. You know Pointer, dirty old fellow!—well, she caught him up the moment she came in, and insisted on bringing him upstairs, and he has taken to her as if he had known her ever since he was a puppy. Mean of him, isn't it; but I declare I don't blame him. Oh! there you are, Kitty Malone." Fred raised his laughing face to encounter another as laughing, a face at that moment grinning from ear to ear.

"Are you Alice?" called a voice. "Are you the one I am to sleep with? Just say, call out loud; don't mind if you shout, because I'm accustomed to that sort of thing."

"Is this Kitty Malone?" thought Alice. She liked frank, jolly girls; but she was not quite prepared for Kitty.

She entered the house, flung down her bag of books, and ran upstairs to the drawing-room. The next moment she found herself in the firm embrace of a girl a little taller than herself, a slim, very pretty, very untidy, very overdressed girl.

"Here I am and welcome to yourself," said Kitty. "I was so vexed you were not here to greet me; but bless you, my dear, I'm quite comfortable. No, I'm not a bit tired—you haven't asked me, by the way, but I suppose you mean to. I had a spiffin' journey. Sick! not I. I'm never seasick, and I enjoyed the train. I made friends with such a dear old gentleman and with two boys. I nearly kissed the boys when I was leaving them, but I didn't quite. Is that you, Fred? Come along in now and let us be jolly together. Why, Alice, how stiff you are; you have not opened your lips yet."

"I have not had an opportunity," answered Alice. "You do talk such a lot, Kitty."

"Do I? I expect we all do in Old Ireland. Bless her! she's a dear old country, and I'm as sorry as anybody to say good-by to her. But, all the same, I am glad to see England (poky, stiff sort of place it seems). Say now, Alice, do you like my dress? It was made in Dublin; it's the height of the fashion I am told."

"It's very showy," said Alice.

"Do you think so? Well, you are plainly dressed; nothing but that brown merino. And—my dear, I thought they were always dressed up to the nines near London. This place is near London, isn't it?"

"Yes, a few miles off. Oh, of course your dress is very nice; but now I must get ready for dinner."

"Oh! and ain't I peckish?" said Kitty, clapping her hands and winking broadly at Fred.

Alice turned to leave the room.

"We may as well go together," said Kitty, following her and slipping her hand through her arm. "Do you know," she said, "when I first came to the house I could scarcely breathe. Why, it's nothing but a nutshell. I never saw such a deeny dawn of a place in the whole course of my life. How many of you live here?"

"Father and mother, and the two boys and I," answered Alice.

"And you are the only girl?"

"Yes."

"Now come to the window and let me have a good squint at you." As Kitty spoke she dragged Alice forward, put her facing the light, and stood herself with her back to it. She began to make a careful scrutiny, calling out her remarks aloud: "Eyes passable, forehead so-so, mouth pretty well, complexion not bad for England, hair——"

"Oh, I say, Kitty, I can't quite stand this," said Alice. "Are those your manners in Ireland? What a wild country it must be!"

"Dear, darling, jolly old place!" said Kitty, dancing up and down.

"And you really give me to understand that people make remarks on one another in that sort of fashion?" said Alice, darting away from her companion and pouring some water into a basin to wash her hands.

"Well, yes, love, they do when they like, and they don't when they don't like. We are free and easy folk, I can tell you, and we have a gay time. I'll tell you all about father and the old castle, and the dogs, and the cows, and the cats, and the rabbits, and the mice when we have a spare moment. That brother of yours, Fred, is not half a bad old chap; and I saw a nice, curly-headed little gossoon coming in just now with his books under his arm. What's his name?"

"Oh, you mean Philip. Yes, he's the youngest; he's well enough if you don't spoil him, Kitty."

"I won't spoil him, bless his heart," said Kitty; "but of course I'll make friends with him. I couldn't live without boys. There are two at home, Pat and Laurence; and, oh! I shall miss Laurie, dear old chap. I must not think of him." Kitty's face underwent a swift change, the brightness went out of it as if a heavy cloud had swept away the sun; the big, very handsome dark-blue eyes, so dark as to be almost black,

grew full of sudden tears; the exquisitely curved lips trembled; she turned her head aside and looked out of the window.

At that moment it seemed to Alice that she saw beneath Kitty's wild, eccentric manners a heart of gold. She only caught a glimpse of it, for the next moment the girl was chatting away in the most light, frivolous, extraordinary style. The dinner-bell sounded through the house, and the pair went down to dinner.

"I'd like to sit near you, please, Mr. Denvers," said Kitty.

Philip's place was always near his father; this had been a custom ever since he had been a baby. Kitty now ensconced herself in the little boy's chair.

"Am I taking anybody's seat?" she asked, looking up.

"Only mine," said Phil.

"Never mind, little gossoon; you shall have it to-morrow. I want to sit near Mr. Denvers because I expect he can tell me a good many things I don't understand."

"You must allow me to eat my dinner, Miss Malone. You see I have a good deal of carving to do, and besides I am a busy man," said Mr. Denvers in a good-humored voice, for it was difficult to resist the roguish glances of Kitty's eyes, and the sort of affectionate way in which she cuddled up to her host's side.

"Oh, I won't talk *over* much," she said, glancing with her flashing eyes round at the entire party. "But you see I am quite a stranger; and, oh my! the place does seem lonely. You are all so stiff, I cannot quite understand it. Is it the English fashion, please, Mr. Denvers?"

"Well, you see," answered Mrs. Denvers from the other end of the table, "we don't know you yet."

"But I am sure all the same we shall be very good friends," said Mr. Denvers. "May I give you a glass of wine?"

"Wine! Bless you, I'm a teetotaller," said Kitty. "Why, it isn't habits of intoxication you'll be putting into me. I never take anything but water, or milk when I can get it; and it isn't Miss Malone you're going to call me, is it, for if it is I tell you frankly that I'll die entirely. I must be Kitty from this moment, or Kitty Malone, or anything of that sort, but Kitty something it must be. Now, is it settled fair and square, Kitty shall I be? Here's my hand on my heart; I'll die if I'm called Miss Malone!"

Fred burst into roars of laughter.

"I say," he cried, "what an extraordinary girl you are!"

"Well, and so are you an extraordinary boy," said Kitty. "Oh, dear me, I am hungry! Do you mind handing me over the potatoes? Why, you don't mean to say you peel 'em. I never heard of such a thing! Why don't you have them in their jackets?"

"Potatoes are generally mashed or peeled or something of that sort in England," said Mr. Denvers. "I see, Kitty—" he added.

"Ah! bless you now for calling me that! What is it you want to say, dear Mr. Denvers?"

"I see we shall have a good deal to teach you," he said, and then he too burst into a fit of laughter, and so the merry, somewhat rollicking meal proceeded.

Alice alone would not succumb to the fascinations of the Irish maiden. She sat holding herself somewhat stiff, feeling a good deal disgusted, wondering what Bessie Challoner would say, what Gwin Harley would think, anticipating in advance Elma's sneers.

Kitty, however, subjugated Mr. and Mrs. Denvers and the two boys completely. As to Pointer, he would not leave her side; as her long, white, taper fingers touched the top of his grizzled head, he looked at her with eyes of unutterable love.

"What have you done to the dog?" said Fred at last. He felt almost afraid, in his great admiration of the bewitching stranger.

"Only given him a taste of blarney," was the reply. "Tell me now, Fred, were you ever in Ireland?"

"No," answered Fred.

"Ah! I thought as much. If you had been, and if you had kissed the Blarney Stone, why, then, it's nothing could withstand you."

"What is the Blarney Stone?" asked Fred.

"Don't you know that much? Why you are an ignoramus out and out. Well, I'll tell you. It's a stone on Blarney Castle, set low down in the wall, five or six feet from the top; and to kiss it, why that is no easy matter, for you have to be held by your heels and let hang over the wall; and if you can get some one to hold you tight—very tight, mind—you slide down and you reach the stone and you kiss it, and from that moment—oh glory! but you carry everything before you. There's not a man, a woman, nor a child, no, nor a beastie either, that can resist you. You bewitch 'em."

"I have no doubt, Kitty, you kissed the stone," said Mr. Denvers.

"Why then, it's yes, sir," she answered raising her big eyes and then dropping them again with an inimitable expression.

"What a queer little girl you are!" he said. "You are very amusing; but I think we must tame you a bit."

"You won't do that, sir. They call me the wild Irish girl at home, and the wild Irish girl I'll be to the end of the chapter. If it's schooling I want, why, I'll have it, but taming, no thank you."

Kitty jumped from her seat and began to dance a sort of improvised Irish jig about the room.

"Do you know the jig?" she said, dancing up to Fred as she spoke.

"No," he answered; "are you trying it on now?"

"Yes; jump up, my hearty, and I'll teach you in a twinkling. Here, watch me; point your toes so, turn round—pirouette as

we call it. Now, then, put your hand on your hip, courtesy to me, and come back again. That's how it's done. Oh, Fred, I'll soon have you as beautiful a broth of a boy as if you were born in Old Ireland."

"Fred, my son, it is time for you to go back to college," said his father. "Kitty, we are very pleased to have you here, and you are a very amusing girl; but you know life is not all play."

Kitty pulled a long face. Fred darted a laughing glance at her, and ran off. Kitty and Alice at last found themselves alone.

"You're disapproving of me a good bit, aren't you, Alice?" said Kitty, going up to the other girl and taking both her hands in hers.

"Well, I think you are very odd," said Alice.

"And do you want me to be quite sober and tame, and to have all the spirit knocked out me, alanna?"

"No; but we don't do exactly as you do in this country."

"And you think you'll tame me into your cut-and-dried pattern?"

"I don't know about that. I don't understand you, Kitty."

"You will after a bit, Alice. It's here I am for sure, and a gray sort of land it is! Why, the sun doesn't even shine!"

"Oh, doesn't it," said Alice angrily. "It's ridiculous to talk in that strain about this country. We have much finer weather than you have in Ireland."

"Don't be cross, darling; I mean it metaphorically. You see we live a gay life over there, we have a joke about everything, and the wit that runs out of our mouths—why, it's like flashes of lightning. Oh, we have a good time in the old country, and when you come and stay with me at Castle Malone you'll say so for yourself. Now, then, what do you want to do this afternoon?"

"I must look over my lessons first."

"Lessons—how many?"

"A good few. You see of course I want to get on."

"By the way, Alice," said Mrs. Denvers, who came into the room at that moment, "I am afraid you had a bad mark for unpunctuality this morning."

"Yes, mother, that is so."

"And what is your place in form?"

"I went down two or three places, mother."

"I am sorry to hear it; your father will be very much annoyed."

"I'll try and make up for it to-morrow, mother. And, mother, Gwin Harley has asked me to go to tea with her this afternoon—may I?"

"I don't see how you can. There is Kitty Malone."

"But she has asked Kitty too."

"What's that?" asked Kitty, bounding forward. "A tea party, bless you?"

"You have been asked to tea at Harley Grove. Mother, may we go? I think Kitty would enjoy it."

"If you are sure you are not too tired, Kitty; you have had a long journey," said Mrs. Denvers.

"I'm not a scrap tired," said Kitty. "I'm as gay as a lark and as fresh as a daisy. I hope it's rather a big swell party, for I have got some awfully pretty dresses. I want to make myself look smart. You can tell me how they manage these sort of things in England. I'm all agog to go."

"Yes, Alice, you may go," said Mrs. Denvers. "But Kitty, my dear, if I were you I would let them down lightly."

"What do you mean, dear Mrs. Denvers?"

"Don't startle them too much. They are not accustomed to such—such frankness as you are disposed to give."

"I'll bewitch 'em," said Kitty, beginning again to dance with light fantastic measure up and down the room. "I'll bewitch 'em one and all. I have made up my mind. I didn't kiss the Blarney Stone for nothing!"

CHAPTER III.

IS THAT THE GIRL?

KITTY and Alice went up to their bedroom, where Kitty began to unpack her trunks and tossed her dresses about—they were all new and most of them were gay. She had scarcely a quiet-looking dress in the entire collection.

"What will you do with those?" said Alice, who saw nothing to admire in the fantastic clothes, and much to condemn. Alice had not the smallest love for dress, and at this period of her life she considered any pains taken over clothes a sheer waste of time.

"But don't you like them?" said Kitty. "I thought girls loved pretty dress. Aunt Honora says so, and so did Aunt Bridget when she came to see us at Castle Malone a month ago. When she heard I was going to England she said: 'Why, then, my dear Kitty, you must titivate up. It will never do for them to see you not looking as bright as a sunbeam and as gay as a cricket. It's colors you'll want, Kitty, and rich materials, and spangles, and jewels, and beads, and all the other fal-lals.' And father said to Aunt Bridget:

"'Why, then, now, Biddy,' said he, 'you just get what's right for the child, for she hasn't a notion, and no more have I, what's worn in that foreign place England.'

"So Aunt Bridget said: 'A wink's as good as a word, and I'll dress her up in dashing style!" So she took the measure of my chest, and the round of my waist, and length of my skirt, and she saw how many inches I wanted in my sleeve, and she said: 'You leave the rest to me, Kitty.' And of course I did, and in three weeks' time down came a trunk that would make your eyes shine even to look within it. Oh!

wasn't it just the darling entirely! Here's one of the dresses. Now, what do you think of that?"

As Kitty spoke she pulled out a pink nun's-veiling, made up with innumerable ruffles and frills and laces and embroidery, a really very pretty dress for quite a gay party, but totally unsuitable for a schoolgirl of Kitty Malone's age.

"Why, it's a long dress?" said Alice. "How old are you, Kitty?"

"It's fifteen I'll be my next birthday, darling. Well, and is there anything wrong about fifteen? I always thought it was a jewel of an age."

"Yes, but this dress is long; why, there's a train to it!"

"Oh, mercy me! so there is," said Kitty. "To tell you the truth, I never even tried on the skirt, I was so bamboozled and overexcited with the others. A train to be sure! Oh, won't I bewitch 'em entirely. Let me try it on, darling. Have you got a long looking-glass anywhere?"

"Not in this room," answered Alice; "it is not necessary."

"Not necessary? Well, now, I should say it's the one thing you ought to have in every room, a long looking-glass that you can see yourself in from top to toe. Why half your elegance is lost if you cannot see how you look your own self. Is there one in any other room?"

"In mother's dressing-room, I think."

"And where's that room situated, my jewel?" asked Kitty.

"Oh, at the other end of the passage; but really, Kitty——"

Kitty, however, was off. Alice stayed in her room, too disgusted to follow her.

"Something must be done to put a stop to this," she thought. "Of course, mother won't keep a girl of that sort. Why, she's a regular wild Indian; I shall be ashamed to take her out this afternoon."

But at that moment a high voice, accompanied by peals of laughter, was heard shouting for Alice.

"Alice, mavourneen, come along this minute! Alice, come quick! quick! Why, it's enthralling I am! You never saw anything like me before, did you? Oh, the Blarney Stone, what it has done for me. Come, Alice, come, come quick!"

"What can be the matter?" called Mrs. Denvers from downstairs. "Has anything happened?"

"Oh, it's only me, dear Mrs. Denvers. Do come up this minute, my dear ducky woman, and see me. I found a dress with a train to it in my trunk, a new dress from Dublin, and I'm in it, and beautiful I look. Come up and see me. I'm gazing at myself in your glass. I never saw anything so lovely in the whole course of my life."

Mrs. Denvers and Alice now both appeared upon the scene. Kitty in her new dress, with a train nearly a foot on the ground, was stepping backward and forward before the long glass in Mrs. Denvers' wardrobe. Her eyes were flashing with merriment and delight. Her small arched feet were

dancing a *pas de seul* in and out of the many flounces which befrilled the end of the pink dress.

"Well, do you like it?" called Kitty. "How do you think I look! Did you ever see anybody more elegant in all your born days? Oh, if only the dear old dad could see me! I feel as if I must kiss myself." Here she commenced blowing kisses vigorously at the gay figure reflected in the glass.

"Come, Kitty," said Mrs. Denvers, "you are not going out in that dress."

"And why not, my dear Mrs. Denvers? Why shouldn't I go out and captivate the natives? That's what a pretty girl is made for."

"Not in this country," said Mrs. Denvers in a somewhat severe voice. "It cannot be done; Kitty, you are much too young to wear a dress of that sort. While you are with me you must expect to be guided by my taste and wishes."

"But, dear Mrs. Denvers, Aunt Bridget ordered it."

"Well, of course, dear, you can wear it at Castle Malone, but not here—at least, not out of doors. Yes, my child, it is a very pretty dress; but I do understand what is right for girls to appear in. You must have something quieter, Kitty."

"Then come along and choose for me," said Kitty, who was as good-natured as she was high-spirited and volatile. "Come straight and choose, for Alice, poor child, is troubled with the sulks."

"What do you mean?" said Alice indignantly.

"But isn't it true, darling; you have such a frown between your brows, and it doesn't improve you. There, cheer up, Alice, honey! Why, it's the best of friends I want to be with you; but you don't like me, not a bit. I'll win you yet, Alice, aroon! But at the present moment you're saying in your heart: 'What a nasty, forward, ill-bred girl that is, and I am ashamed, that I am, that my schoolfellows should see me with the likes of her.'"

"Come, come, Kitty, no more of this," said Mrs. Denvers. "If you are going out you have no time to lose. Yes, let me see your wardrobe. I think this dark-blue dress is the best."

"But you are not expecting me to go out in the open air without a body!" said Kitty, "and there's nothing but a skirt to this. I suppose I may wear one of my pretty blouses?"

"Yes; that skirt and a nice blouse will do. Now then, get ready, both of you, as quickly as you can. Kitty, remember I expect your things to be put away tidily."

"To be sure, ma'am. Why, then, it would be a shame to spoil all these pretty garments. I'll put them away in a jiffy, and come down looking as neat as a new pin."

Alice, who had brushed out her hair, put on a clean collar and a pair of cuffs, was now standing waiting for her friend.

"Look here," she said suddenly, "will you be long putting away your things and dressing?"

"Not very long, darling; but I must curl my fringe over again."

"I wish you wouldn't wear a fringe, Kitty; none of the nice girls do at the school."

"Is it give up my fringe I would?" answered Kitty. "What a show I'd be! Why, look at my forehead, it's too high for the lines of pure beauty. Now, when the fringe comes down just to here, why, it's perfect. Aunt Bridget said it was, and she's a rare judge, I can tell you. She was a beauty in her youth, one of the Dublin beauties; and you can't go to any city for fairer women than are to be found in Dublin. I tell you what it is, Alice, I see you are in a flurry to be off. Can I overtake you?"

"You can," said Alice suddenly. "You can come to me at Bessie Challoner's house."

"Bessie Challoner!—what a pretty name!—Challoner! I like that!" answered Kitty, looking thoughtful. "And where's her house, aroon? What part of the neighborhood is it situated in?"

"Come here to the window and I'll show you. When you leave this house you turn to the right and walk straight on until you come to Cherry Lodge—that's the name of the house. Bessie and I will be waiting for you."

"Well, then, off you go, and I won't keep you many minutes."

Alice ran out of the room. She found her mother waiting for her down-stairs.

"Oh, mother," said Alice, "she's too dreadful.'

"Come now, no whispering about me behind my back," called a gay voice over the stairs. "I thought it would be something of that sort. That's not fair—out with your remarks in front of me, and nothing behind."

"Kitty, Kitty, go back and dress, you incorrigible child!" called Mrs. Denvers.

"Mother!" said Alice.

"My dear Alice," said her mother, "you will soon learn to like that poor child. She has a great deal that is good in her, and then she is so pretty."

"Pretty?" muttered Alice. "Oh, I see you're bewitched like the rest of them."

She left the house, feeling more uncomfortable, depressed, and angry than she had done for several years.

Mr. Denvers was a lawyer, and made a fairly good income; but his large family and the education of his boys had strained his resources to such an extent that he was very glad to accept the liberal sum which Kitty's father was paying for her. Alice knew all about this, and at first was more than willing to help her family in every way in her power. She did not murmur at all when she was asked to give up half of her room to the Irish girl. She was quite willing to take her under her patronage, to show her round, to try to get friends for her among her own school-fellows—in short, to make her happy. But then Alice had never pictured anyone in the least like Kitty Malone. She had imagined a somewhat plain, shy,

awkward girl, who would lean upon her, who would give her unbounded affection, and follow her lead in everything. Now, this sparkling, racy, daring Kitty was by no means to her mind. There was not the least doubt that Kitty would not be guided by anybody, that she would never play second fiddle, and there was also a dreadful fear down deep in poor Alice's heart that she would fascinate her school-fellows instead of disgusting them, and that Alice's own dearest friends would leave her in favor of the stranger.

She walked very slowly, therefore, a frown between her brows, discontent and jealousy in her heart.

Bessie was waiting for her at the gate.

"Why, Alice," called out Bessie, "how late you are. We shan't get to Harley Grove by five o'clock."

"I can't help being late; it is a blessing you see me now," answered Alice. "I wonder you waited for me, Bessie."

"Well, my dear," answered Bessie, "I would much rather walk with you than take a solitary ramble by myself. I thought," she added, "you were going to bring that new Irish girl with you. Has she come?"

"Has she not come?" answered Alice. "Oh, Bessie, Bessie, it is because of her I am late. Oh Bessie, she is quite too dreadful."

"How so?" asked Bessie.

"She is the most extraordinary, wild, reckless, absolutely unladylike, vulgar person I ever came across in the whole course of my life."

"What a lot of adjectives!" laughed Bessie. "I shall be quite curious to see her; from your description she must be a monster."

"She is a monster, a human monster," answered Alice; "and the worst of it is, Bessie, that in some extraordinary way she has fascinated both father and mother, and even Fred—Fred, who hates girls as a rule; they are all so taken up with this blessed Kitty Malone that they don't mind her perfectly savage manners. I can tell you I am quite miserable about it."

"Poor Alice," answered Bessie in a sympathetic tone. "I suppose, then, dear, she is not coming with us?"

"Oh, yes, she is; she is following us. She could not find anything quiet enough to put on."

"Quiet enough to put on! What do you mean?"

"Oh, my dear, her wardrobe is beyond description. She absolutely wanted to come to poor Gwin's quiet little tea party in a dress fit for a ball, flounced and frilled and laced and ribboned, and with a train to it, absolutely a train, although she is not fifteen yet."

Bessie could not help laughing. "I am sorry she is fond of dress," she answered; "I can't bear that sort of girl."

"Oh, you'll positively loathe her, Bessie. I quite pity you at the thought of having to walk with her this afternoon."

"My dear Alice, we must make the best of it," answered

Bessie, "and I don't suppose she will quite kill me; she will be amusing at any rate."

"Amusing enough to those who have not got to live with her day and night," answered Alice in a very discontented voice. "Oh, and here she comes," she added; "and, look, she is running and racing down the road and waving her hands to us. Oh, Bessie, it is intolerable! Don't you pity me?"

"What! is that the girl?" cried Bessie. "How very——"

"How very what?" asked Alice.

"How very pretty she is!"

"Pretty," said Alice in a tone of such withering scorn that Bessie could not help gazing at her friend in astonishment.

CHAPTER IV.

TIFFS ALL AROUND.

KITTY'S dark-blue skirt was all that was correct and proper; it reached just to her ankles, and her remarkably small and beautifully-shaped feet were encased in the neatest possible tan boots. But the blouse of light pink silk, all bedizened with bunches of ribbons and lappets of lace, was in Alice's eyes almost as painfully unsuitable as the trained skirt. Kitty wore a little close-fitting cap of dark-blue velvet on her head. Her hair, of the softest, cloudiest black, true Irish hair, was piled up in a thick mass behind; in front it waved and curled round her white forehead. Kitty was very tall, and, child as she still was in years, had a more formed figure than most girls of her age. She was drawing on her tan gloves now, and unfurling a parasol of tussore silk with a heavy lace fall.

"I do hope I'm smart enough," she said, panting slightly as she spoke. "Is this one of your school-fellows?"

"Yes; my friend, Miss Challoner."

"Haven't you got a Christian name?" asked Kitty, staring frankly with her wide-open eyes at Alice's friend.

"Bessie is my name," answered Bessie Challoner.

"Do you mind my calling it to you? I like Challoner awfully, and if I were to say Challoner without the Miss it might do, but Miss is so stiff. I hope I may be Kitty to you, and then you won't object to being Bessie to me."

"Not a bit," answered Bessie heartily; "but we are a little late, and had better walk on as fast as we can."

Gwin Harley lived in a beautiful house about two miles away, and the girls turned down a path which led across some fields in the direction of Harley Grove. The time of year was toward the end of May, and the weather was perfect.

Kitty, who had been silent for a time, now stood in the middle of the field, threw both her hands to her sides, let her parasol drop on the ground, and opened her mouth wide.

"Have you gone quite mad?" asked Alice in a severe tone.

"Mad is it?" said Kitty; "not I. I am taking in some of

the air." Here she began to breathe very deeply and with considerable noise. "Why, my ducky girls, the pair of you, I was fairly suffocated in that bandbox of a house; now the breeze here is fine and fresh, and I want to fill my lungs. Is there any objection?"

"Oh, none I am sure," answered Bessie; "but you really did look most extraordinary."

"I am glad no one was passing at the moment," said Alice. "What would they have thought?"

"Does it matter what they think?" asked Kitty. "We never mind what any one thinks of us in Ireland. Ah, the dear old place; how I pine for it! There now, my lungs are full, and we can go on again."

She picked up her parasol and began to stride forward.

"Isn't she a horror?" whispered Alice to Bessie.

"Hush!" answered Bessie; "she only does it to amuse us. The thing is to take very little notice; we'll soon tame her down."

"Is it taming me you're after?" called back Kitty. "Well, then, you'll never do that, for I come of a wild lot, and I have always been called Wild Kitty from the moment I could speak. But there's no harm in me, not a bit. Now, then, I'll walk as sober as you please. What shall we talk about?"

"Is there anything you would like to ask us?" said Bessie.

"I am sure then, darling, I don't think there is. Wouldn't you like to ask me some questions? I'm as open as day. I'll lay bare all the thoughts of my secret soul to the pair of you, if you care to hear them."

"I don't know that we do," said Bessie. "You see we have got to make your acquaintance yet, Kitty."

"Ah, now it's nice of you to call me Kitty, and that's a very pretty little voice you have; soft and winning. How is it you say some of those words? I can't get my tongue round them; but I dare say I will after a bit."

"Would you like to know what kind of place we are going to?" asked Bessie.

"Oh, I'll wait until I get there," answered Kitty. "I suppose it's like all other places; there's a house and some girls; and if we are asked to tea, why we'll get tea, and they'll think me no end of an oddity, and I'll think them a lot of muffs; but that don't matter. Oh, my dears, if you only saw Old Ireland, and if you only knew the free life we have there, and the beautiful air that comes blowing in from the broad Atlantic. Why, it's smothered I'll be in this queer place. I doubt if I'll stay long. I'll write to father, and ask him to take me back again."

"I would if were you," said Alice stoutly.

"Now, what do you mean by that, 'Alice, aroon?'"

"I mean," said Alice, who had now almost lost control over her temper, "that if you go on as you have done since you came here, we shall none of us like you, and I for one shall be delighted when you return to Ireland."

As Alice spoke Kitty's charming face suddenly lost its brilliant color; it became white, and her dark eyes flashed with an angry fire. She stood perfectly still for a moment, then began to walk on a little faster than before.

"You have hurt her, Alice," said Bessie; "you should not have said that."

"I don't care; she made me do it; she is intolerable."

"Still, you had no right to speak as you did; remember she is a stranger."

Here Bessie ran after Kitty, and tried to slip her hand through her arm; but the Irish girl made an impatient movement, and, shrugging her shoulders, walked on quicker than before.

"Oh, leave her alone," whispered Alice; "let us talk about things that interest us. Why should all our lives be upset by her? There, she is going on in front; let us fall back and talk about interesting things. Have you finished your work yet?"

"Oh, yes; I had a great deal to do this afternoon. I do hope, Alice, that Gwin won't mind if I ask her to let me go into the library. I must take a peep into 'Household Encyclopedia'; it is such a chance."

"Oh, I am sure she won't mind," replied Alice. "Gwin is the soul of good nature. I only dread what she will think."

"Oh, you need not dread anything," said Kitty, suddenly turning round and coming back to the girls. "I shan't be here long; don't be afraid."

"Please, Kitty," said Bessie; "don't mind what Alice said just now, she was vexed, because we are not quite accustomed to manners like yours. You will soon get into our ways, you know."

"Never, never!" cried Kitty.

"Well, at any rate, don't mind about it now. Do you think you will like your school life?"

"No; I shall just hate it."

"What a pity that will be; but I'm sure you don't know what you are saying. You are vexed with Alice, and I don't wonder—Alice, you were very hard on her."

"Oh, never mind," answered Kitty; "don't ask her to apologize. I can go home again. I don't want to be with people who have made up their minds to dislike me. All the folks at home love me, and—" Here tears dropped from her eyes, splashing down her cheeks in bright round pearls.

"I didn't mean to vex you," said Alice, who was disconcerted at this evident grief. "I dare say I shall get accustomed to you after a bit. I mean I do not really want you to go home."

Kitty's face underwent a change, rapid as a flash of lightning.

"If you want to make friends, Alice, it's as right as rain," she cried. "I know I was vexed, but it is over now; yes, it is over. I am willing to be friends if you are willing."

"Of course," said Alice; "and I know I ought not to have spoken as I did; but you do manage to fret me dreadfully. I never saw a girl exactly like you before."

"It is all right now you really want to be friends," answered Kitty; "and I will try to be as dull as you please." Here she paused and seemed to consider. "There's no use," she continued after a moment; "I mean I must be myself whatever happens. I must be genuine. Please, Alice, let me be genuine for a week; if at the end of that time you find me intolerable, why I'll be off."

"Don't say anything about that," said Bessie; "everything is quite new to you, and Alice did speak unkindly; but please, Kitty, don't be angry if I say something."

"Oh, no, I won't be angry with you; you're a real duck," cried Kitty.

"Well, we English girls are not quite accustomed to your sort of way; we are quieter here and more reserved. Perhaps you had better——"

"Oh, I know exactly what the end of that pretty little speech is going to be," said Kitty; "but I cannot. I must be Kitty Malone or nothing. I was born that way. Why, bless you, it is in our race. Aunt Bridget was just the same when she was young, and so was Aunt Honora, and even father; oh, and—and Laurie. If you only saw Laurie and Pat! Oh, I wish you knew Laurie; if you saw him you would say, 'If there is a broth of a boy in the world he is one.'"

The girls had now reached the avenue gates at Harley Lodge, and the lodge-keeper ran out to open them. A few moments later they found themselves in sight of the pretty, modern mansion which Mr. Harley had lately purchased. The door was opened by a butler in very correct livery, and the young folk were shown into a handsome drawing-room at the other side of a broad hall. There was no one in the room when they entered, and Kitty walked straight up to a glass let into the wall, and began to survey herself with intense satisfaction. She had by this time forgotten the rebuff which Alice had given her, tears had only added to the brightness of her eyes, and her momentary fit of vexation and temper had deepened the color in her blooming cheeks. She nodded to herself with smiles of intense satisfaction, pushed her velvet cap in a slightly more coquettish way over her mass of black curls, and began once again to dance a very graceful *pas de seul* in front of the glass.

"I do think I have nice feet," she said; and just at that moment the door was opened, and Gwin Harley and Elma Lewis entered the room.

Gwin, statuesque, graceful, dressed in the most suitable manner, made a perfect contrast to poor, excitable Kitty. Kitty's words had been plainly audible, and Alice flushed deeply with vexation.

"Why, then, I had better introduce myself," said Kitty, who was by no means abashed. "Are you Miss Harley? You

have got a very nice looking-glass, let me tell you; it shows off the figure to perfection."

Gwin could not help coloring in surprise and astonishment.

"I am Kitty Malone, at your service," continued Kitty. "Shall I drop you a courtesy in the true Irish way? Some of us bob like this—so, and some of us step back like this," here Kitty performed a very elaborate and very graceful courtesy, then stood upright, and laughing heartily, showed rows of pearly teeth. Gwin held out her hand.

"May I introduce my friend, Elma Lewis? Elma, this is Miss Malone."

"Kitty Malone. I won't be called Miss Malone," said the incorrigible Kitty.

"Won't you all come up-stairs now, girls?" said Gwin, who perceived that both Alice and Bessie were annoyed by Kitty's manners.

"If we take off our things we can go into the library and have a good game before tea, or would you prefer a walk?"

"Well, I for one am tired," said Kitty. "The fact is," she continued, "these boots are somewhat tight. They're awfully becoming, you know, aren't they? but they do squeeze a little just across the toes; however, as Aunt Honora says, 'Pride feels no pain,' and I am desperate proud of my feet. Shall we all look at our feet, and see which has got the prettiest pair?"

"I don't think we will just at present," said Gwin. "If you are tired you must take your boots off. Have you not just come from Ireland?"

"Bless you, yes," answered Kitty; "I only arrived to-day. The place is as new to me as it can be. Up to the present I don't think much of it, although you have got a lovely house, Miss Harley—fine and airy with plenty of big rooms. I suppose you have got money *galore;* have you?"

"I believe we have," said Gwin in some astonishment, and a haughty note coming into her voice.

"Ah, now, don't begin to be proud and stiff!" exclaimed Kitty. "It is quite wonderful; every one I speak to here seems to take me the wrong way. What in the world do you all mean? I thought when I came to England that people would say, 'Well, now, that's a remarkably pretty girl. I am sure she's Irish by the twinkle in her eye and the roll of the brogue in her voice; but we'll like her all the better for that.' But, bless my heart! that's not the way you're taking me. Every time I open my lips somebody seems to think I have said something wrong. Upon my word it's a nice state of things, and I, the darling of my old father. If Aunt Honora and Aunt Bridget were here they would soon put matters straight; and Laurie, dear, darling, old Laurie, if he saw his Kitty put upon, wouldn't he give it to you all?"

"We none of us want to put upon you, Miss Malone," said Gwin Harley.

"*Miss* Malone!"

"Yes," said Gwin firmly, "it is the custom here to call girls

by their surnames for a little until we get to know them; but I am sure," she added kindly, "you will soon be Kitty with us all, for I see you are very nice, although you have not quite our ways."

"Ah, there, that is all I want you to say," answered Kitty with a profound sigh, "and now I'll go up-stairs and slip off my bits of boots, for they are a trifle tight. Can you lend me a pair of your shoes, Miss Harley?"

"Yes, with pleasure," replied Gwin, and turning, she led the way out of the room. The rest of the evening passed off better. Kitty became a little subdued, and satisfied herself with talking less, and casting ravishing glances of delight and roguish entreaty first at one girl and then at the other. It was extremely difficult to withstand her, for her voice was low and singularly sweet, her eyes were beautiful, she could not do an ungraceful thing, she was altogether like a bright, flashing meteor, and soon she began to exercise an extrordinary fascination both over Bessie Challoner and Gwin Harley. Having got over her first astonishment, Gwin began to take a sincere interest in the pretty stranger. The lovely expression of her coral lips made her long to kiss them, and to assure the Irish girl that she for one would be her friend; but the next instant Kitty said something so very much against the grain that Gwin felt as much repulsed as a moment before she was delighted.

Immediately after tea Bessie went off to the library to hunt up her darling "Encyclopedia."

"Now that she has gone," exclaimed Gwin, "we are not likely to get her back for some time. What a remarkably earnest student she is!"

"The Earnest Student?" interrupted Kitty. "I thought that was the name of a religious book. I think father has got it at home."

"Perhaps so," replied Gwin, "but we always call it to Bessie. She is wonderfully clever. She gets on splendidily at school, taking everything before her. I am certain she is the kind of girl who will make her mark by and by."

"I hate studies!" said Kitty in her low, humorous voice.

"I am sorry for that," answered Gwin, "for if you come to school you won't be at all popular if you do not care for your books."

"Popular? How do you mean? Is it with the teachers or with the girls?"

"Well, with both I fancy."

"Then, I tell you what," exclaimed Kitty, "I'd like to bet with you that you are wrong—that I'll be the most popular girl in the whole of the school with the teachers—yes, with the teachers—and the scholars as well."

"You must be very conceited," exclaimed Elma, who had sat silent during the greater part of the evening, taking Kitty in, however, all the same.

"Conceited? No more than you are," cried Kitty, "but I

know my powers, and I have not kissed the Blarney Stone for nothing."

"Oh, you need not tell us that ridiculous story over again," said Alice.

"But I should like to hear it," cried Gwin.

"You really would not, Gwin; it is too absurd. We must show Kitty, now she has come to live among us, what is real wit and what is not. Her way of talking is only silly."

Gwin knit her brows, and looked pained.

"I would rather not correct her now," she said in a gentle voice. Then she added, her eyes sparkling with sudden eagerness, "Would it not be a good opportunity for talking over the rules of our society, girls!"

"Oh yes," cried Elma, "yes; but is it well to——"

Here she bent forward, and began to whisper vigorously in Gwin's ear.

"Yes, I think so," answered Gwin.

"I wouldn't, I really wouldn't," said Elma. "I am certain Alice agrees with me."

"I can guess what you are saying," cried Alice, "and I do agree most heartily."

"And I can guess what you are saying," exclaimed Kitty, starting to her feet with flashing eyes. "You don't want to talk about your society or whatever it is because I am present. Well, discuss it without me. I'll find my way to the library. Poor dear Bessie is the only decent one among you, and I shall go and sit with her. How do you know I won't take up with literature just to spite you all? I can do anything I have a mind to, and that you will soon find to your cost."

She ran out of the room as she spoke, slamming the door behind her.

"There, that's a comfort," cried Alice, breathing freely for the first time. "Did you ever, girls, in all your lives, see a more terrible creature? What is to be done? Why, she will disgrace us all at school. You know what a very nice set we are in at present."

"Oh, an excellent set," said Elma, in a sarcastic voice.

"You know, Elma, that we do belong to the nicest set in the school, and I am sure, Gwin, your father——"

"You need not drag father in," cried Gwin. "Father likes all the people I like."

"But, surely—" began Alice.

Gwin looked at her gravely, then she nodded.

"I am not quite certain yet," she said; "but I think it highly probable that I shall take up that poor, wild, little Kitty. At least she is fresh; she speaks out her mind plainly, and there is a great deal to admire about her."

"Then, listen, Gwin," cried Alice; "if she is taken into our special society I will resign."

"Will you really, Alice? What, if I ask you to stay?"

"It is hard to refuse you, dear; but you scarcely know what

all this means to me. I am rubbed the wrong way; I don't understand myself. But frankly, Gwin, you are not going to ask Kitty Malone to join our society?"

"What if it does her good?"

"But ought we not to think of the others? She is a perfect stranger to us all at present."

"But she won't be long. Bless the child, she has no reserve in her, and I do want to help her, poor little girl! Well, we need not decide that point at present.

"Do let us vote to leave her out," cried Alice.

"No, Alice, we will leave the point undecided. Now let us set to work, and begin to form our rules, for really we have no time to lose."

"But what are we to do without Bessie?" exclaimed Alice. "Whatever happens, we cannot do without Bessie Challoner; she will be the life and soul of the whole society. Shall we send for her, Gwin?"

"No, Kitty is with her, and they had better not be disturbed."

"What a difference Kitty makes," cried Alice. "I did think we should have had a delightful and heavenly evening, and it has been all ruction from first to last."

"Because you dislike her so much, Alice," said Gwin.

"Well, I do," said Alice; "I can't abide her. But do I show my dislike so plainly?" she added.

"Rather! Any one can see it in the curl of your lip and the expression in your eyes; and then you say such terribly withering things to the poor girl. You try to crush her."

"Well, if I may say what I think," cried Elma, "Kitty Malone seems to me to be a very unpleasant, vulgar girl, and I cannot imagine why she has been sent here."

"Oh, as to her vulgarity," said Alice, who suddenly felt forced to defend herself against Elma's spiteful speeches, "Kitty comes of a very old family, and her father is as rich as ever he can be. They live in a wonderful castle in County Donegal, just overhanging the sea; and from what I learn are considered county people. Father was very pleased to have her, and whatever she is, she is a lady by birth."

"So she is rich?" remarked Elma in a low voice. "Well, at any rate," she continued after a pause, "she is very pretty."

"Pretty!" cried Gwin; "I should just think she is. She has the most lovely face I ever saw. Girls, it is quite true what she says; she will fascinate any number of people. That dashing, daring way of hers will go down with numbers. Yes, she will make a revolution in Middleton School, I am certain."

CHAPTER V.

INCORRIGIBLE KITTY.

Mr. Harley's library was a beautiful room. It was lined with books from floor to ceiling, and these books had been

selected with the greatest care. Standard works of all sorts and in three languages were to be found on certain bookshelves, also modern works, both poetry and prose, with some of the best novels of the day.

Bessie Challoner never envied rich people. She cared nothing whatever for fine dresses, nor for carriages and horses, nor for the luxurious life of the wealthy, but she did envy Gwin Harley the use of her father's library; and when she entered the room now, with that delicious faint smell of leather which all libraries possess, she sniffed first with ecstasy, and then climbing on the ladder secured the volume of the "Encyclopedia" which she required, and seating herself at one of the center tables, was soon lost in the fascinations of her subject. After a time a little cough, very gentle, however, caused her to raise her head, and there standing before her was Kitty Malone.

Kitty's long arms had dropped to her sides, and she had pushed back her masses of dark hair. There was a pathetic expression about her rosy lips, and tears trembled on her long eyelashes.

"Why, what is it, Kitty; what do you want?" asked Bessie.

"Ah, then it's good to hear you say that word, aroon," said Kitty. "I want to sit near you. I won't speak, no, not a syllable. Hush will be the only word with me, hush! hush! hush! You can go on with your beloved reading and I'll stay near you; that's all I require. Why, then, it's just a shelter I need, and nothing more. Read away, Bessie, my honey, and I'll do nothing to interrupt you."

"But why have you left the others?" asked Bessie.

"Never mind, dear, now. I'll just sit quietly here, and contemplate you while you are studying."

Bessie sighed impatiently. She then bent again over her book, and began to devour the pages. Kitty watched her with marked interest.

"I wonder if it will be my fate to have to take up with literature in sober earnest," she said to herself, "I, who can never abide a book. Oh, to be back again in the dear old place! I should not be a bit surprised if Laurie is out fishing now, and Pat with him. And oh, suppose they are bringing in the trout, and the creatures are leaping and struggling as they come to shore, and father is going round to feed the dogs —why, the thought is enough to madden me. Oh, then, why did I ever leave home? I don't care *that* for books, nor for being clever nor for— How she works to be sure! How earnest she looks. She has got a very fine forehead, although it is miles too high. She ought to wear a fringe; it would improve her wonderfully. I will cut her hair some day if she will let me. I will cut it and curl it. I have got the dearest little jewel of a pair of curling tongs that ever was seen! Aunt Honora sent it to me in a box with a spirit lamp all complete when I got the rest of my things. I'll just exercise those little tongs on dear, nice Bessie. I do wish she would

not be so devoted to that book, she might talk. Oh, I am lonely. I think I'll fidget a bit."

Kitty moved her chair, creaking it ominously; but Bessie had got to a most thrilling part of her subject, and Kitty might have creaked the library down before she would have roused her companion's attention.

"Now, if I sigh, perhaps that will do it," thought Kitty. She opened her mouth and let some profound sighs come up from the depths of her heart; but they only depressed her still more, and had no effect whatever on Bessie.

"I think I hate intellectual people," muttered the Irish girl. She jumped to her feet.

"I must do something to rouse her or I shall go mad. She is the nicest of them all, much. I wish she would speak to me. Why should I break my heart, and why should she simply go on devouring that stupid book? Here, I know what I'll do. I'll just toss down one of the big volumes; it will make a clatter and she will have to look up. Perhaps I'll let it drop just the tiniest bit in the world on the corner of her toe; that will finish her." Here Kitty laughed excitedly, pushed out her arm and knocked over a huge volume which certainly fell a good deal more than a tiny bit on poor Bessie's foot.

"Oh, Kitty, what have you done?" cried Bessie. "You have quite hurt me. I wish you would not drop the books about."

"There, darling, I had to do it. Pray forgive me," said Kitty.

"You had to do it!" answered Bessie. "Do you mean that you did it on purpose?"

"Why, then, yes, love—that's what I do mean exactly. I did it because I wanted you to talk to me, and you *would* think of nothing but that book."

"It is such a chance," answered Bessie, "and I wanted to find out for myself all about that wonderful magnetic iron ore. You know it never loses its power, it is potent for hundreds and hundreds of years, and——"

"Oh, don't tell any more, or I'll lose my senses. Dear Bessie, what does magnetic iron ore matter? Bessie, I'm awfully unhappy. Every one is so unkind to me. Promise you'll be my friend, won't you?"

Bessie looked up, and then she saw something so touching in Kitty's face that she closed her book with a reluctant sigh, to devote herself the next moment with all the sympathy she possessed to her companion.

"I am sure you are suffering, Kitty, and I am sorry for you," she said. "I'll fetch my hat and we'll go out for a little."

"Oh, what a darling you are!" answered Kitty.

A moment or two later the girls were walking across the beautifully-kept garden; they soon reached a shady path at the further end.

"And now, Kitty," said Bessie, "I mean to lecture you a little."

"Anything in the world you like, darling. I'm quite agreeable. Aunt Honora and Aunt Bridget lecture me, and so does the dear old dad sometimes; but I always say when they have finished that it is like water on a duck's back—it rolls off without making the least bit of impression, and then they laugh and say that I am the queerest mixture they ever came across, and that they had best leave me to nature. But perhaps I'll listen to you, Bessie."

"I wish you would," said Bessie. "I am sure," she added, speaking with great earnestness, "that you are a very nice girl, Kitty; but at the same time you are wild."

"Oh, I pride myself on that," said Kitty in her frankest of voices.

"But I wish you would not, Kitty, for it really isn't nice."

"Not nice! Now what may you be meaning by that, aroon?"

"Well, there is a sort of dignity which I think a really well brought-up girl ought to possess."

"Oh, my! dignity is it?" said Kitty. She stepped away from her companion, drew down her face to a ridiculous length, nearly closed her eyes, and folded her hands demurely across her breast.

"Is that pleasing you, mavourneen?" she said. "Is it dignified and sober enough poor Kitty Malone looks now?"

"Oh, Kitty, you will joke about everything."

Kitty immediately changed her mood.

"No, I won't," she said. "I am really awfully obliged to you. You don't know what all this has been to me. Father said I was growing too wild—yes, the darling dad did; he agrees with you down to the core of his heart, and he said I must go to England and be taught manners. But, bless you, they'll have a job. I told him so when I was going. I said, 'Dad, it's the hearts of the teachers I'll be breaking'; and dad said, 'Oh, no, you won't, Kitty, aroon. You'll be a good girl, and you'll try to please your old dad and you'll come back a beautiful, perfect lady!' He said it with tears in his eyes, he did, the darling; and I promised, and down on my knees I went and asked God to help me. But, dear, it's like the froth of the sea-foam inside me, the fun and the mischief and the nonsense and the ways that you think queer; but, all the same, those ways delight the good folk at home. Must I really give them up, Bessie—must I?"

"To a certain extent," said Bessie, "or you will have a lot of enemies here, Kitty, and you won't be at all happy."

"How I wish I lived with you, Bessie Challoner. You're a broth of a girl, that you are. You have not taken a dislike to me just because of the fun bubbling up in my heart?"

"No, dear; on the contrary, I like you extremely."

"Ah, you precious duck of a darling! It is a good squeeze you would like, if I gave it to you?"

"Well, I am not very fond of being kissed; but if you must, Kitty."

"I must, dear, I must, for the heart in me is full to the brim. Now then, stand still, and I'll catch you up close to my heart. There! isn't that better?"

Poor Bessie gave some long-drawn breaths, for the firmness, in fact the ferocity, of Kitty's embrace quite hurt her for a moment.

"There," said Kitty, "that's the way we hug in Old Ireland. Now I'm a sight better, and I'll let go. So you do like me, Bessie?"

"Yes, very much indeed, Kitty, only—please don't do it again."

"I won't to-night, I won't really, but it's wonderful that you don't like it. I wish you could see Aunt Honora and Aunt Bridget hug one another. Why, it's the noise they make when they get together, and the way they kiss! Oh, dear, I hope some day you'll come to Ireland."

"You don't tempt me by these descriptions," replied Bessie. "But now, Kitty, will you promise just to be a little quieter, to keep in all those irrepressible and—really I must say it, dear, at the risk of hurting you—those silly words."

"But then I'm silly myself," said Kitty. "Can you expect wisdom out of nonsense? I am pure and simple nonsense from first to last."

'But you do want to be something better? You do want to lead a good life?"

"A good life! I never thought there was anything bad in me."

"You want to learn for instance?"

"No; that I don't, darling."

"You don't want to learn, Kitty? Then what is the good of coming to Middleton School?"

"Listen," said Kitty. "I'll do anything for father. Father said I was to learn, and that I was to get manners. Now I think your manners are perfect. I'll model myself on you, dear; that I will. Will you teach me your manners, Bessie Challoner?"

"I'll do all I can to help you, Kitty."

"And you'll be my real faithful friend?"

"Yes, only please not——"

'I won't, dear, I won't to-night; but when I meet you to-morrow you'll allow me just once?"

"Well, if it will break you in."

"It will, it will. It will enable me to bear Alice. I am not the sort to hate people; but I'll soon get to hate her. It's an awful affliction that I have got to live with the Denvers; not that Mrs. Denvers is bad, nor Mr. Denvers, poor dear, nor Fred, but Alice! I'd like to get Alice over to Ireland, to Castle Malone. I could punish her a bit if I put her into Laurie's hands. But there!"

"Well, Kitty, time is going," said Bessie. "It is a bargain

that I help you to learn some of our English ways, and that you, in order to pay me, try to be gentle yourself, and to restrain some of your wild words."

"I'll try. I'll do my very, very best. You'll see when I get to Middleton School what a proper, respectable sort of girl I'll become."

"And you'll work hard too, won't you, Kitty? For I know it will do you a great deal of good, and I am sure you are very intelligent."

"Well, I can take in most things; only it's no end of a bother."

"I am certain you will succeed if you try," said Bessie. "Then it's a bargain, isn't it? You'll try to learn a great deal, and you will do your best to get better mannered?"

"Why, of course I will. I hate learning, and I don't want to be bothered with lessons; but there's nothing under the sun I wouldn't do for those I love; and I love father and I love you too, Bessie Challoner."

"They are calling us. We must go into the house," said Bessie.

"Do yield to me on one point," cried Kitty.

"What is that?"

"Let us go back to the house with our arms round each other's waists. It will show Alice that we have come to an understanding. I don't care twopence about Miss Harley nor about that other girl—I don't remember her name; but I want Alice to see us. Why, it's mad with jealousy she'll be. Come along, aroon. Here's my arm firm round your waist; now let us dance up to the house."

"Oh Kitty, Kitty, you are incorrigible!" cried poor Bessie, and a feeling of despair certainly visited her at that moment.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TUG-OF-WAR.

A few days after the events related in the last chapter Alice Denvers, Bessie Challoner, Elma Lewis, and Gwin Harley met once more at Gwin's pretty home, to discuss the rules of a little society which they were drawing up among themselves. The nicest girls in their set were to be invited to join; but the important subject of the rules was first to be discussed. Gwin had drawn up a plan which she now submitted to her eager companions.

"The most important thing of all is the name," she said. "I thought of calling it 'The Early Rising, Devoted to Study Society.'"

"Oh, twice too long,' said Bessie. "Who could be bothered saying all these words? You know when we are in the rush of school-life we cannot be bothered talking of the 'Early Rising Devoted to Study;' it would never, never do. We must express what we mean in a single word if necessary."

"Then let us get one," said Gwin. "You have not the least idea what a headache I had last night searching in the dictionary and cudgeling my brains; but a sensible word which would express all our meaning I could not get."

"Let us think what our meaning clearly is," said Elma.

"Don't you know that yet?" exclaimed Bessie. "The society is to be formed as an incentive to make us work extra hard. You know," she added, "I always think the motives of school-life are quite wrong."

"Oh, do listen to the words of Miss Wisdom," said Elma, in a very mocking tone.

Bessie's big gray eyes flashed for a moment with indignation; but she soon recovered her usual calm.

"I think the motives of school are wrong," she repeated; "there are prizes offered, and there is a lot of emulation——"

"And how could we live without emulation?" cried Alice. "Why, it is the very breath of life."

"But the desire of each to excel the other is not surely why we are sent to school," continued Bessie. "We are sent to school because our parents want us to learn something. They don't want us specially to get prizes, although they are glad when we do, because they suppose that we have accomplished some of the objects of our school-life; but their real wish is that we should know English history, and history generally, that we should be well acquainted with geography, that we should speak French fluently, and understand German so as to be able to converse in that tongue, and to read the literature."

"Oh, do listen to the bookworm," cried Elma.

"In short," continued Bessie; "that we should become accomplished women—that is undoubtedly the real object of school."

"Well, we are not gainsaying it," said Gwin. "We all know, dear Bessie, what you feel about learning; it is the breath of life to you."

"It is, I rejoice in it," said Bessie. "A good vigorous tussle with a tough subject is the keenest pleasure which I can possibly have."

"But the rest of us are not made the same way," continued Gwin. "Now I like my studies very much—that is, in moderation. When I am learning and mastering French, and getting through my music creditably, and, in short, going through the usual curriculum of work, I feel interested; but I also have a delightful sense that if I work for so many hours I am entitled to play for so many hours."

"Oh, bother the play," interrupted Bessie.

"You see, Bessie Challoner, that is the difference between us. I like work just to form part of my life, but not the whole; you want work to form the whole of your life."

"Yes; that I do," said Bessie.

"But now to return to the society," interrupted Elma. "We all know that it won't be the slightest effort to Bessie

to join; but she will be a good incentive to the rest of us. She will always be at the top of the tree, at the head of her class, and all that sort of thing. She won't require to be told to get up early, because she always does."

"I tell you what," interrupted Bessie; "let us put things into our rules which will be a tug-of-war for me too. For instance, now, I am untidy."

"Well, yes; just a little bit," said Gwin, her eyes dancing.

"It's more than a little bit," said Bessie. "Oh, Gwin, you don't know what a nuisance it is to keep my room in order, and sometimes I forget the things dear mother tells me, and I am impatient with poor little Judy, who takes, I must say, a fiendish delight in putting my things in hiding. Now, our rules might include tidiness of person and order generally. It's no trouble for me to keep my books in order, nor my mind in order; but I do hate washing my hands before every meal, and brushing my hair and doing it up in a fashionable roll at the back of my head."

"Oh, my dear child," said Elma, "do you imagine for a moment that that excrescence at the back of your head is fashionable? I never saw anything more dowdy."

"Dowdy? Is it?" said Bessie. "I spent five minutes over it this morning, and twisted it up three times in order to give it that horrid little handle of a jug look which you all aspire to. Well, well, I don't suppose we need add to our rules that the girls who belong to the society are to be fashionable."

"It would be a really good idea if we did," said Elma. "I cannot see why schoolgirls should be a lot of frumps. Our society is to effect a certain object which can never be acquired unaided in a great school like Middleton. We want to be as ladylike, as refined, as nice as if we belonged to a very small and select school. We get the best teaching at Middleton, but I don't suppose we get the best manners."

"Well, let us add all these things to the rules," said Gwin, "and let us begin to put them down at once. First, as to the name. Until we can think of a better we must call it the 'Mutual Improvement Society.'"

"A hateful word," said Bessie. "The M. I. S.!"

"Yes, it does sound priggish," said Elma.

"Well, I dare say some one will have genius enough to think of a more flashy and brilliant name," said Gwin, "but for the present we will call it the 'Mutual Improvement,' for that is exactly what it means. Now then for the rules."

As Gwin spoke she drew in front of her a sheet of foolscap paper; and, dipping her pen in ink, looked eagerly at her three young companions.

"Rule I.," she said.

"For goodness' sake," cried Bessie, "let Rule I. apply to study. Do let down lightly with regard to tidiness and fashionable hair, and all that sort of thing."

"Yes, we will begin about the most important matters

first," said Gwin. Here she began to write rapidly in pencil. "I must copy this out in my best and most copperplate hand presently," she continued; "but while we are correcting matters and getting down our rules somehow pencil will do. Well, Rule I. Shall it be something like this, girls? 'The members of this society are expected to aim for the top of the class in each branch of their study at Middleton School. They are expected to gain at least one prize at the midsummer examination.'"

"That sounds rather like emulation coming in," interrupted Bessie.

"It must come in, Bessie—it must," said Elma. "We must have something to work for."

"I thought the love of the thing—" began poor Bessie.

"Oh, Bessie Challoner, do shut up. Yes, Gwin, that first rule goes very well," said Elma. "We are to aim for the top of the class, and we are to secure at least one prize each. Hurrah! for the Mutual Improvement Society! Now, then, let us get to Rule II."

"That applies to deportment," said Gwin. "'The members of the Mutual Improvement Society are to aim at ladylike manners, they are to refrain from slang in conversation, and they are to refuse to make friends with girls who indulge too largely in that special form of vulgarity.' Poor Kitty Malone!"

"But she does not talk slang," said Bessie. "She talks Ireland, and Ireland and England are as far apart as the poles."

"Rule III.," continued Gwin, "relates to tidiness; and now, Bessie, comes your tug-of-war. The members of the society must engage to keep their home things in perfct order, as well as their school desks. They must be neat in their persons, exquisitely clean with regard to hands and teeth, and tidy with regard to hair.'"

"I don't think I'll join," said Bessie.

"Nonsense, Bessie; it was you who told us to put all this in. I, as a matter of course, always do these things," said Gwin, looking very sweet and the essence of young ladyhood as she spoke.

"Oh, yes, you dear old thing, you are perfect; but you don't live in the sort of ramshackle house we do," said Bessie. "However, never mind. I am quite agreeable to go in for the tug-of-war. And, now, is there anything else?"

"Oh yes, there is," said Elma, "and I think it is a most important thing. 'The members of the Society, as far as they possibly can, are to adhere to fashionable dress, to hair done in a stylish manner, and in short to that distinction of appearance which ought to characterize the lady of the present day.'"

"Well done, Elma," said Gwin, "that is a capital rule."

"It is a hateful rule,' said Bessie. "I really don't think I can join. I don't know what fashionable clothes are. I

never study the fashions. I have not the slightest idea whether sleeves are worn stuck out to the size of a balloon or skin-tight to the arm. All I ask for in a sleeve is that it should be comfortable; all I ask for in a dress is that I should not know I have it on. I like to be warm in winter and cool in summer. More I do not ask for."

"Then the rule will do you a wonderful lot of good," said Gwin. "And now is it decided? If so we will draw up the rules in proper form, and——"

"I tell you what," said Bessie. "I have thought of a name and a good one too. Let us call the society the 'Tug-of-war Society'."

"Well done," said Gwin; "that will be capital. And now is there to be a subscription or is there not?"

"Oh, certainly," said Alice. "It would make it much more distinguished, and prevent too many girls asking to join. We want to have the Tug-of-war Society rather select, don't we?"

"I suppose so," said Gwin; "but I don't think that really depends upon the amount of the subscription. What do you say to half a guinea, girls?"

Alice looked thoughtful, and Elma's face turned rather pale; but she was the first to say she thought Gwin's suggestion an admirable one.

"Then that is all right," said Gwin, "and I will set to work to write out the rules as neatly as I can. After they are all set out in due form, we can see if there are any improvements to be suggested."

Gwin set to work, bending low over her foolscap paper, and Alice offered to help her. Elma and Bessie wandered out of the room, and soon their conversation turned to the much-discussed subject of Kitty.

Bessie stood up warmly for the harum-scarum Irish girl, as Elma called her.

"She has a lot of good in her," said Bessie warmly. "She would be a splendid girl if she were tamed down a little. I really don't think we want to take much of the fire out of her; but if she would only restrain some of her wild speeches it would be all the better; for if she remains as frank as she is at present to the end of the chapter she cannot help making enemies."

"I want to ask you a question, Bessie," said Elma, dropping her voice to a low tone; "is it true that Kitty Malone is rich?'

"Rich?" echoed Bessie. "I really cannot tell you."

"I thought you might happen to know, as you have made such chums with her. She is your greatest friend now at Middleton School, is she not?"

"Certainly not," replied Bessie. "What do you mean by asking me such a strange question, Elma? Alice is far and away my greatest friend, and after Alice I like Gwin best."

"Oh, everybody likes Gwin Harley," said Elma; "who could help it? She is so beautiful to look at, and she has such a delightful, lovely home."

"I cannot see that her having a lovely, delightful home has anything to do with our liking her," said honest Bessie.

"Not to you perhaps," answered Elma, and a queer look, half-wistful, half-defiant, came into her eyes.

"I thought you would be sure to be able to tell me if Kitty were rich," she said again afer a pause.

"I cannot. You must ask Alice—she lives with Alice. She has plenty of pretty dresses, and all that sort of thing; but I don't know anything about her having money."

"I will run into the house this minute and ask Alice," said Elma.

"Do, of course, if you are anxious; but I cannot imagine what difference it makes to you."

"No, it doesn't, but I am just curious on the subject. I won't keep you long."

Elma dashed into the house. She presently came back.

"I have found out all about it," she said.

"All about what?" asked Bessie.

"What I went into the house for. How forgetful you are, Bessie!"

"I was wondering if I might steal into the library," said Bessie. "I did not get all the information I wanted about magnetic iron ore, but— Well, what is it, Elma?"

"Kitty Malone is rich, very rich, and——"

"I can't see that it matters," said Bessie—"I mean to us."

"Oh, but it matters a good deal. You don't understand. I shall certainly vote that we ask her to join the Tug-of-War Society."

"You will?" cried Bessie—a look of great pleasure came into her eyes. "Then I am really glad, for to join such a society would do Kitty more good than anything else in the world. Only the nicest girls will belong, and she will get at once into the best set. She is as wild as she can be, but she has got plenty of honor; and if she once gave her word that she would do a certain thing no one would do it better."

"Let us have her by all means. Let us put it to the vote as soon as we go back to the house," said Elma. "Come, Bessie, no slinking away in the direction of that fascinating library. They have nearly copied the rules, and we are to read them over and make comments."

"I think it will be a delightful society," said Bessie. "I am sure it will do me good."

"It is meant to do us all good," said Elma. "Tug-of-war! I should rather think it will be! How I shall hate that terrible effort to get to the head of my class; not that I am stupid or dislike my lessons."

"That would be the nice part as far as I am concerned,"

said Bessie; "but oh! the fashionable sleeves and the stylish hair. Oh dear! I often feel inclined to have my hair cut short."

"Well, Bessie, you would be a fool if you did," said Elma. "Your splendid hair; why, it's nearly down to your knees."

"Yes, and that's the bother," said Bessie, "for mother insists on my brushing it out every night for at least ten minutes, and all that time is taken from my books. I tell you, Elma, I would gladly change with you."

Elma's locks were very thin and straggly, and she could not help coloring at this left-handed compliment; but at that moment Alice appeared on the balcony to tell the other two girls that the rules were ready, and that they might return to the house. They did so, and the rules were then read carefully over (by Elma on this occasion), criticised by Gwin, Alice, and Bessie, and finally carried as far as the original members of the society were concerned. The next important thing was to put to the vote who was to be asked to join and who was to be excluded. Several girls were named, and among them Elma suddenly introduced the name of Kitty Malone.

"Now what do you mean by that?" said Alice, her eyes flashing angrily. "If Kitty joins the society, I, for one, will resign."

"But you cannot, dear," said Gwin in her placid voice. "Remember you are one of the founders; you are bound to uphold the society now for at least one term of its natural life. At the end of that time you are permitted to resign, but certainly not before."

"Then, as I presume I have a vote with regard to the election of members, I certainly do not wish for Kitty Malone," said Alice.

"I think the votes must go by the wishes of the majority," replied Gwin; "does any one else want her?"

"I do," said Elma, holding up her hand.

"And I think it would be good for her," said Bessie.

"Dear me, Bessie, how spiteful of you to say that," cried Alice.

"But I do think it, Alice; I do truly."

"Why, Bessie?" asked Gwin.

"Well, you know there are the sort of things mentioned in our rules which would just give Kitty the sort of restraint she wants," began Bessie.

"Yes, I think I begin to understand you, Bessie. I too will vote that she is asked to join," said Gwin.

Alice looked very sulky, but did not say anything further, and soon afterward the girls broke up their conference.

CHAPTER VII.

ELMA.

KITTY MALONE was admitted to a low form at Middleton School, her acquirements being the reverse of distinguished. This fact did not give her the smallest sense of discomfort. On the contrary, she was pleased; and although her fellow-scholars were all younger and smaller than herself, she soon became a sort of queen among them, laughing and joking with them, and flying round the playground with half a dozen small girls at her heels, feasting them with unlimited chocolate and telling them stories. She soon got through her somewhat easy lessons, and was wilder and more incorrigible than ever. The only sober moments she seemed to enjoy were when she was with Bessie; for Bessie Challoner took a sincere interest in her, and was very anxious to get her into a higher form, where she would be with girls nearer her own age, and would thus be forced to submit to more discipline than she could enjoy with the younger girls. Bessie also hoped great things from the Tug-of-War Society, and soon told Kitty that she was to be asked to become a member.

"I will certainly join when I am asked," answered Kitty. "I have not the least idea what you are all driving at; but I'll become a member if it's to be in the same society with you, my darling duck of a girl!"

Bessies then read her a copy of the rules.

"Why, then, you can't expect me to adhere to the first of them," was Kitty's answer. "It's no, it's no to that, Bessie. I wouldn't tell a lie for any earthly thing, and I could not drive myself to the head of that class. Why, I wouldn't take the place from sweet little Agnes Moore for all the world. Why it's tears I'd bring to the pretty eyes of the the creature. Oh, I couldn't get ahead of her. I'd just as lief be at the tail—just as lief."

"But, Kitty, have you no ambition?"

"Well, no, dear, I don't think I have. I never could see the fun of taking a prize from another; it's no use I'll be in the society, not the least bit."

"Well, all the same it would do you good," said Bessie, "for you know you love your father, and you said you would try to acquire knowledge to please him."

"Oh, where's the good of reminding me of that," said Kitty, looking very thoughtful and somewhat pensive. "Why did you come out with it, Bessie, aroon; it's fretting the heart out of me you are. Dear old dad! there's nothing I wouldn't do for him."

"I am glad I did remind you, Kitty, for you know you have come here to learn."

"Ah, dear, I'll shut my ears if you talk any more in that

sort of way," said Kitty. "If I must learn, I must; but don't be reminding me of it, there's a good creature—it's play out of school if it's work in."

"Much work you do, Kitty! Why, I always see you laughing and winking and twinkling your eyes, and pushing your feet about."

"Pushing my feet about! And is it to keep them in a corner I would, pretty feet like mine! Why, they are meant to be seen. That's the only reason why I object to a long dress, because it does not show so much of the feet and ankles. Ah, sure it's dear little ankles I have, as neat and trim as you please."

"Kitty, you are getting wilder than ever."

"Well, darling, I'll cool down if you'll just let me give you one of my big hugs."

"I really can't; my ribs are quite sore. You must not do it to-day. I told you, you might once a week, but no oftener."

Kitty sank down on the nearest chair and looked comically miserable.

"Go on with the next rule, Bessie," she said, after a moment. "I want to belong to the Tug-of-war because it's close to you I'll be, darling. What's the next rule?"

Bessie read it out to her.

"Why, now, it's the pink of a lady I am myself," said Kitty. "I was always told I was; I don't mind that rule in in the least. There won't be much of a tug-of-war there; if Kitty Malone is to be a lady, why, a lady she is. I wish you could hear Aunt Honora and Aunt Bridget talking about our ancient family and our long and royal descent. Go on, Bessie; that's not so bad as taking the prize from poor little Agnes. What's Rule III.?"

Rule III. was read aloud to Kitty, who shook her head solemnly several times.

"Now, to be frank with you," she said, "there's only one bond between Alice and me, and that is we do make a froth of the things in our drawers; and if we are both to struggle against our besetting infirmity, it will go hard with us; but there, it will be fun to see her struggling to be tidy and all to no purpose. I think I'll join on that account. I shall like to see her fighting her drawers. I know if I'm put to it I can keep mine twenty times tidier."

"I am now coming to Rule IV.," said Bessie; this she read aloud with some qualms, for she disliked it so very much herself. Kitty's eyes flashed with pleasure.

"Now, that is after my own heart," she cried, "fashionable dresses are they, and hair done up in style. Mavourneen! mavourneen! you will have to wear a fringe!"

Kitty burst into peals of laughter.

"Oh, Bessie," she said, "I have just been longing to attack that head of yours. I'll bring my little tongs along, and I'll curl up such a lovely fringe on your great intellectual forehead."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Bessie, clasping her hands over her head to protect her thick long hair.

"But you must, mavourneen, you must if you join the Tug-of-war Society. Oh, it's beautiful you'll look! And I tell you what it is, Bessie, I'll lend you the patterns of my new sleeves—those that are all crinkled from above the elbow down to the wrist, and puffed ever so much at the top, with little tucks, and little insertions, and little——"

"Kitty, I won't listen to you for another moment. I shall try to dress as neatly as I can, and perhaps I must twist my hair into a more stylish coil at the back of my head; but beyond that I absolutely refuse to go."

"Well, it's a delicious rule," said Kitty Malone, "and I hope I'll work you round after a bit, Bessie. It seems but fair that if I yield to you with regard to the other rules you ought to yield to me about Rule IV. I am sure if I do take the prize from poor little Agnes Moore, and if I never speak a word of slang, and if I keep my abominable drawers as neat as a new pin, and all my clothes in perfect order, that you on your part ought to wear a good thick, heavy fringe, and have your hair pointed out ever so far at the back in the way it is worn in the present day. I'd love to do it; and you have magnificent hair, Bessie, aroon! so you have."

"I must ask you to leave me now, Kitty," was Bessie's answer. "You are a very funny girl, and there is a great deal that I like in you; but I cannot neglect my studies even for you."

"Oh, bother your studies!" answered Kitty.

Bessie, however, was quite in earnest, and Kitty had to leave her.

The next day there was another meeting at Gwin Harley's house, and the members of the Tug-of-war Society were formally initiated into the mysteries of what they had undertaken. About ten girls joined in all, and it was decided to limit the number to these until the end of the present term. In addition to the four chief rules it was also clearly understood that the members were all to be absolutely faithful the one to the other, that no member of the Tug-of-war Society was to speak against another member; on the contrary, she was to uphold her through thick and thin, to help her if possible, to aid her in moments of difficulty, and to rejoice with her in moments of triumph. Once a week the members were to meet at each other's houses. There they were to have tea together, to discuss the rules if necessary, but at any rate to have a pleasant time. As the summer advanced picnics were to be inaugurated on Saturdays, and fun of some sort or another was to be the vogue.

Kitty, who had dressed herself for this auspicious occasion in a dress of the palest blue, with a silver sheen running in zigzag lines all over it, whose black hair was curled up on her forehead and coiled fantastically round the back of her

head, whose eyes were shining and wreathing themselves in all sorts of smiles, could scarcely restrain her spirits while the rest of the girls were debating on the rules.

Finally Gwin laid a little box on the table, and asked the new members to subscribe their half-guinea each. Each girl dropped her half-sovereign and six-pence into the box with the exception of Elma, who, coloring a little, said she would bring it to Gwin the next day. No one made any remark, as it was well known in the school that Elma was anything but well off, and Gwin privately resolved to subscribe for her without saying anything about it.

Then the girls had tea in Gwin's own private sitting-room, and afterward they wandered about the lawns, and returned home in the cool of the evening. On this occasion Elma found herself side by side with Kitty Malone. Kitty was walking quietly; she had exhausted some of her emotions during the hours that she had played tennis, and laughed and chatted with the other members of the Tug-of-war Society, and when Elma put her hand on her arm, and looked up at her half-timidly and half-beseechingly, Kitty stopped short, and said in her hearty, frank voice:

"And what may you be wanting with me, Elma? Is it a favor I can do you; because if it is I am sure you are welcome to it with all the pleasure in life."

"You are a good-natured girl, Kitty," said Elma; "I always felt that from the very first. Shall we drop a little behind the others? The fact is I don't want every one to hear what I am going to say to you."

"If it is a secret, darling, don't tell it to me," said Kitty, "for I cannot keep it. I always say so quite frankly. I say to each person who comes to me with a private confidence, 'Confide nothing in Kitty Malone, for Kitty Malone is a sieve.'"

"Oh, but it would never do for you to be that," said Elma, who was somewhat alarmed and secretly greatly disgusted. "A girl is not worth her salt if she tells what is confided to her by another girl; and of course now that you have become a member of the Tug-of-war Society, if you are found blabbing any of our secrets at Middleton School I don't know what will happen!"

"I wonder what would happen!" cried Kitty; "it would be quite nice to find out. Do tell me, Elma."

"How can I when you don't understand," said Elma. "You would be wanting in all honor; none of us girls would speak to you again."

"Wouldn't Bessie Challoner, the darling?"

"Certainly not. She could not; none of us could."

"I shouldn't like that," said Kitty thoughtfully. "I did not know, when I joined the Tug-of-war, that I was to be burdened with secrets. And am I not to explain to any of the other girls why I am moving heaven and earth to get to the very head of the class? Am I not to breathe the real reason,

when I am taking poor little Agnes Moore's place, and breaking her heart, the pretty lamb? Is that so?"

"You certainly are not," said Elma. "Dear me, Kitty, what a very extraordinary specimen you are!"

"Well, don't scold me, for pity's sake," said Kitty.

"I am so sick of every one telling me that I am an extraordinary specimen. In Ireland they think I am a very fine specimen; but here! oh, it's nothing but holding up of hands and rolling up of eyes, and 'Oh, dear, let us get out of her way!' and 'Oh, dear, how queer she looks in her grand clothes!' and—and——"

"Do stop talking, Kitty. You are the most awful rattlepate——"

"There, now, on you go," said poor Kitty. "I'm a rattlepate, am I? It seems that I can never speak but I get into somebody's black books."

"You don't get into mine, I am sure," said Elma. "But I think you ought to be greatly obliged to me for telling you what is your plain duty with regard to the Tug-of-war Society. It is just like a secret society; our rules are our own, and not a soul who is not a member must know anything about them."

"Well, I won't tell," said Kitty. "When I say a thing I stick to it. I won't split—there! that's flat, and I suppose I am obliged to you, Elma."

"You ought to be," answered Elma. "Why, what a terrible scrape you would have got into. And now, then, Kitty, I have something else to tell you."

"Well, and what is it?" asked Kitty.

"First, are you not pleased that you are a member of the Tug-of-war Society?"

"To be sure I am. I think it is awfully nice of all you girls to ask me to join."

"It is a great distinction," continued Elma; "a new girl like you, one who is not known a bit in the school! Out of the whole school we have only selected ten, including the founders, and you are one. You ought to think yourself in rare luck."

"So I do."

"And you ought to be very grateful."

"So I am."

"But do you know whom you ought to be grateful to?"

"Well, I suppose to Bessie."

"Not a bit of it; it is to me you ought to be grateful. But for me you would not be a member of the Tug-of-war Society."

"But for you, Elma?"

"No."

"Was it you who got me asked to join?"

"I was the one who insisted on your being asked to join us. I put it plainly to Bessie and to Gwin, and they quite agreed with me. Alice was the only one who voted against you."

"Oh, just like her, spiteful thing!" said Kitty, coloring with annoyance. "Well, I am sure, Elma I am obliged to you, and if there's anything I can do——"

"I am coming to that," said Elma; "it's not much, but if you could——"

"Could what? Why, I'll do anything. Is it one of my gowns you want to borrow?"

"No, no. What extraordinary ideas you have!"

"Oh, there you begin again," said Kitty. "I never can speak right. Well, what can I do for you, Elma?"

"If you could—just until next Monday—if you could lend me some—some money," said Elma, coloring as she spoke, her voice faltering, and her eyes seeking the ground.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LITTLE HOUSE IN CONSTANTINE ROAD.

KITTY stared at her companion for a moment, then she put her hand into her pocket and took out a very fat sealskin purse. She opened it and held it out to Elma.

"Help yourself," she said.

Elma looked into the purse—golden sovereigns lay there in delicious rows. There must have been at least fifteen sovereigns in the purse.

"Take as many as you like," said Kitty; "you are heartily welcome."

"You don't mean it; you can't," replied Elma, turning very pale.

"Why, what are you hesitating about? You said you wanted some money. Dear heart alive! everybody wants money in Ireland, we are always borrowing one from the other. Take as many of those yellow boys as you fancy, and say no more about it."

"I am obliged to you, Kitty," said Elma. "I think you are quite splendid; but can I—do you really mean it—can I take five?"

"Five, bless you! Take them all if you want them. I have only to write to the dear old man at home, and ask him to send me a fiver or a tenner, and he'll do it. You need have no qualms, and——"

"But when must I give them back?"

"Whenever you like."

"You don't really require them on Monday, do you?"

"I don't require them at any special date. Pay me when it is convenient. Here, you may as well have ten."

"I could not; it is too much," said Elma. She put her hands behind her back, her teeth were chattering, and she was trembling all over. She was afraid that Kitty must read her through and through.

"Oh, what is the use of bothering?" cried Kitty Malone. "If you won't take ten, take eight. Let me see, that leaves

me seven over. Seven sovereigns. I don't ever want to spend any more here. Of course I may require a new dress when the fashions change. I must keep strictly up to date now that I have joined the Tug-of-war; but in case I do, I'll just send a wire to Aunt Bridget in Dublin and she'll send me over a beauty. Ah, she's a dear old soul, Aunt Bridget is. There, Elma, do take the money and be quick about it."

Emma—feeling sick and low, hating herself as she had never hated herself before—dipped her greedy fingers into Kitty's sealskin purse, and soon extracted eight of the golden sovereigns. These she slipped into her pocket.

"I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you," she said.

"Not another word!" cried Kitty. "I have forgotten all about it already. Now shall we have a run? I want to catch up to Bessie; I have not had a word with her for the whole of the day."

Elma no longer required to keep Kitty Malone in the background. She had now gained her object. Hoping against hope to extract from half a sovereign to fifteen shillings from the generous-hearted Irish girl, she suddenly found herself the lucky possessor of eight whole sovereigns. Never in the whole course of her life had Elma possessed anything approaching such a sum. Her mother was very poor. She had only one sister, a daily governess. All Elma's people were hard up, as the expression goes, and Elma herself only attended Middleton School because an aunt paid her school fees. Hardly ever could the girl secure even half a crown for her own pleasure. She hated poverty, she detested the small privations which slender means involved. She was in no sense of the word a high, refined character; on the contrary, there was something small in her nature, something little about her. She had ever cringed to the wealthy. She had made friends with Gwin Harley, who was rich, high-spirited, and generous, but also very conscientious, and with abundance of common sense. A glance had told Elma that she could never ask Gwin to lend her money; but Kitty—innocent, frank, generous Kitty—had proved an all too easy prey.

At that moment Elma despised Kitty as much as she was grateful to her. The eight pounds, which she might return whenever she liked, lay lightly in her pocket; she almost danced in her excitement and sense of triumph. Of course Kitty would never tell—that went without saying; and in the meantime she was rich beyond her wildest dreams. The girls had joined forces when they came up to the stream which led across a wide field called the Willow Meadow, Kitty linked her hand inside Bessie's arm, and Elma and Alice walked side by side.

"Well," exclaimed Alice, "how did you get on with her, Elma?"

"With whom?" asked Elma.

"Oh, need you ask? That detestable Kitty Malone. I saw you sucking up to her, and wondered why."

"I wish you would not use such horrid, vulgar words, Alice," said Elma. "You know you are really breaking the rules of the Tug-of-war. We are requested not to make use of slang."

"I forgot," said Alice. "But if it comes to that," she continued, "I believe I shall have to leave the society if I can never express my feelings with regard to Kitty Malone."

"But do you really dislike her as much as ever?" asked Elma, who, shabby and mean as she was, in her poor little soul could scarcely bring herself to run down generous Kitty just then.

"Dislike her!" cried Alice. "I hate her—there! I suppose that's flat and plain enough."

"It certainly is."

"But you don't mean to say—it is impossible, Elma—that you see anything to like in her?"

"Well, of course," answered Elma—who wished to propitiate Alice, for her nature was to be all things to all men—"I can see at a glance that she is not your style; she has not got your cleverness and refinement, dear Alice."

"Oh, bother!" cried Alice. But all the same she was pleased, and when Elma tucked her small hand inside of her arm Alice did not shake her off.

"Any one can see that," continued Elma Lewis; "but I don't think she is quite so bad as you paint her, Alice."

Alice's private opinion of Elma was that she was a little toad, and she now managed to extricate herself from the smaller girl's clasp.

"I shall never like her," she said. "There is no good in your praising her to me. If you mean to be her friend you must do so from a double motive."

"How uncharitable of you!" cried Elma, coloring crimson as she spoke.

"Oh, I can guess it very well, my dear," pursued Alice. "But for you she would not be a member of the Tug-of-war. What would have been a delightful society, a pleasure to the best girls at Middleton School, will be nothing whatever but a ridiculous farce, a scene of high comedy, something contemptible, now that Kitty Malone has joined it. But for you she would never have been asked to join. Why did you do it, Elma?"

"For no reason in particular," answered Elma.

"That is certainly not true, and you know it."

"I cannot think why you speak to me in that tone," said Elma. "What have I done to you that you should think so badly of me?"

"Oh, I don't think badly of you, Elma, not specially; but I have always seen that whatever you did, you did with a reason. In your own way you are clever, you are extremely worldly wise. There are certain people who would commend you; but you are not like the rest of us. You are not like Gwin, for instance, nor like Bessie, nor like me. Yes, I will

frankly say so, I am better than you, Elma. I have not got your double motives for everything. You are only a girl now; I don't know what you will be when you are a woman!"

The thought of the eight sovereigns so comfortably reposing in her pocket made Elma able to bear this very direct attack. She determined to take it good-humoredly; there was no use whatever in quarreling with Alice. Accordingly she said cheerfully:

"You may think what you like of me, Ally, but I hope in the course of years that you will find I am not so bad as you paint me."

Shortly afterward the girls parted, and each went on her way to her special home. Bessie ran briskly up the short avenue which led to her house, waving farewells to her companions as she did so. Alice and Kitty were obliged to content themselves one with the other; and Elma, in the highest good-humor, her heart bubbling over with bliss, departed in the direction of her own humbler residence. She had to walk quite a mile and a half, and at the end of that time she found herself in a much poorer part of the large suburb where Middleton School was situated. The houses here were of a humble description—not even semi-detached, but standing in long, dismal rows, a good many of them backing on to a railway-cutting. These houses boasted of no small gardens, but ran flush with the road. They were built of the universal yellow brick, and were about as ugly as they could well be.

Elma paused at No. 124 Constantine Road. As she did so, a high, rasping, and fretful voice screamed to her from an upper window:

"You are later than ever to-day, Elma, and mother has been fretting herself into hysterics. Do come in at once and be quick about it."

Elma mounted the two or three steps which led to the hall door, and pulled the bell with considerably more energy than was her wont. The sovereigns were in her pocket; they made all the difference to her between misery and happiness. She entered the house in high good-humor.

"What is it, Carrie?" she called to the fretful voice, which was now approaching nearer.

The next moment a slatternly-looking girl appeared at the head of the stairs.

"It's very easy for you to ask what is it," cried its owner, speaking in high dudgeon. "You promised to be in between five and six, and it is now between seven and eight. Here is all my chance of an evening's fun knocked on the head. It's just like you, Elma; that it is."

"Oh, never mind now; please don't scold me," said Elma. "What is it—about mother; has she been bad again?"

"Oh, it's the usual thing; she has had one of those dismal letters from father. I can't imagine why she thinks anything

about them. It came just when we were all sitting down to dinner, and she began to cry in that feeble sort of fashion."

"Oh, don't, Carrie; she will hear you," said Elma. "Pray go back to your room, and I'll be with you in a minute. I have something to tell you. You won't be quite so miserable when you hear my news."

Carrie stared at Elma, and then slowly backed until she reached a very minute bedroom which she and Elma shared together.

Elma ran briskly upstairs. Turning to her right, she knocked at a certain door; waited for an answer, but none came; then turned the handle and went in. The venetian blinds were down here, and the form of a woman was seen lying in the center of a big bed.

"Is that you, Elma?" said a voice; and then the head was buried once more in the pillows, and no further notice whatever was taken.

"Yes, mother, I am here," answered Elma. "I was thinking you might like something nice for your supper—a crab or a lobster, or something of that sort. Which would be your preference, mother?"

"A crab or a lobster!" muttered Mrs. Lewis. "You might as well ask me if I should like a bottle of champagne, or some caviare. One is about as likely to be forthcoming as the other."

"I tell you you may choose," said Elma. "I have my hat still on, and I'll go as far as the fishmonger's, and bring in either a lobster or a crab."

Mrs. Lewis raised herself on her elbow as Elma spoke.

"What are you dreaming about?" she said. "Where have you got the money?"

"Never mind, I've got the money. Which would be your preference?"

"Oh, crab, dear; crab. I like it when it's well dressed; but then Maggie never can do anything properly."

"I'll dress it on this occasion," said Elma. "You shall have a good supper—crab and salad, and— There, mother, do keep up heart again; you give way too much."

"Ah, child," said poor Mrs. Lewis, "I have had another terrible letter. He says he is starving; he cannot get work. I made the greatest possible mistake in allowing him to leave the country."

"You could do nothing else," said Elma, with a little stamp of her foot. "You know he would not help you in any way; he had to leave. But there, mother, you shall tell me the dismal news after tea. You will feel ever so much better when you have partaken of the dainty meal I mean to get for you."

Mrs. Lewis did not say anything further. Elma bent down, touched her parent on her brow with the lightest possible caress, and then stepped on tiptoe out of the room.

"Poor mother!" she muttered. "It is surprising the kind

of things that comfort one; she is soothed at the thought of crab for supper with salad. Well, that is all right; she will be as amiable and petting to me as possible for the rest of the day. Now, then, for Carrie. A loose, untidy, badly hung together girl like Carrie is a trial to any sister. However, I know the sort of thing that pleases her. I must be very careful of my treasure-trove. I shall not spend it lightly; but in giving my family small unexpected surprises it will be doing me an immensely good turn."

Elma now entered the room where Carrie was fuming up and down.

"Well, what have you to say for yourself, miss?" she cried, when her younger sister put in an appearance.

"Only that I am very sorry, Carrie; but to be honest with you, I quite forgot that you wanted to go out this afternoon. Did I not tell you that I was engaged to tea at Gwin Harley's?"

"You are forever with that odious girl," said Carrie.

"Gwin Harley an odious girl! What in the world do you mean?"

"What I say. Oh, of course I have seen her, and I know she's pretty, or some people would think her so; in my opinion she's vastly too stuck up; and so Sam Raynes says. Sam saw her last Sunday in church, and he said she wasn't a bit his style."

"Oh, pray, don't quote Sam Raynes to me," said Elma. "Well, Carrie, of course I had tea with Gwin, and of course she's about the nicest girl in the world; and Kitty Malone was there, that scamp of an Irish girl. Oh, she's not so bad when you get to know her better. And Alice Denvers was there, and Bessie Challoner. We had quite a nice time. Of course I told you about that society that I have joined. Well, there are about ten girls members now, quite the élite of the school. I believe we shall do a vast lot of good."

"What does it matter to me," said Carrie, stamping her foot. "I have lost my pleasant afternoon with Sam. He and his sister promised to meet me. I was to go with them to the Crystal Palace. Oh, it's too provoking."

Carrie still fumed up and down the room.

"And I have such a dull time," she continued; "those children are quite past bearing. They wear the very life out of me. See what that little imp of a Claude did to my dress this afternoon."

As Carrie spoke she held up a decidedly shabby dress, which bore a huge rent at one side.

"He caught it in his nastly little boot," said the girl. "He was scrambling up on my knee, and made such a fuss, and there happened to be a tiny hole, and then he wriggled and wriggled, and made it worse and worse. The skirt is not fit to wear. I don't know what I shall do. I really have not a blessed farthing to buy myself another new thing."

Elma made a careful calculation.

"How much was that stuff a yard?" she asked suddenly.

"What does it matter, Elma? It's worn out now, and there's an end of it. You cannot buy me another gown; so where's the good of talking."

"But perhaps I can," said Elma dubiously.

"My dear Elma what do you mean?"

"Well, I am not quite certain, of course," said Elma; "and it would have to be very cheap—very cheap indeed. But what color would you like, Carrie?"

"Oh, blue," said Carrie, "rather light in shade. I love blue; and Sam says I look sweet in it."

"If you begin to quote Sam again I don't think I'll give you sixpence for anything. You know perfectly well that I loathe and detest him."

"Oh, that's your way," said Carrie. "You think it is very fine to detest all the young men in our set; but I tell you Sam is a right good fellow, and he has his ideas as much as anybody. He is going to get a rise, too, at Christmas, and——"

"Are you engaged to him, Carrie?" asked Elma suddenly.

"Not yet. Oh, we don't think of any such thing; but I like to go with him. He is great fun, and so is Florrie. Florrie doesn't mind a bit how often she acts gooseberry."

Elma went and stood by the window. She looked gloomily out. How shabby and sordid her home was; how miserable everything seemed! Carrie was really a trial to any sister. Elma wondered if in the future she would have to tolerate Sam Raynes as her brother-in-law. A sick feeling crept over her. She was not a particularly refined girl; but in her school life she associated with girls of a totally different caliber from poor Carrie, and a shudder ran through her frame as she thought over her sister.

"If you mean anything by that talk about a new frock, you had better speak out plainly," said Carrie. "If you can really give me money to get the stuff, something pretty and cheap, I could buy it to-night; there is still plenty of time."

"Put on your hat and we'll go out at once," said Elma.

Carrie rushed to her wardrobe, took down her frowsy, overtrimmed hat, stuck it on her towsled head, drew a pair of gloves up her arms, and announced herself ready. The two girls ran briskly downstairs. Mrs. Lewis called from her bedroom after them:

"Where are you two going?" she said. "Am I to be left alone in the house?"

"No, Maggie is in the kitchen," called out Carrie.

"Oh, I am sick of being by myself, and I want my supper."

"I must go out to choose the crab, mother," said Elma.

"Oh, the crab," replied Mrs. Lewis in a mollified tone. "If you are going really to get one, Elma, be sure you see that it has plenty of coral in it, and choose nice, crisp lettuce. I care nothing for crab without lettuce."

"All right mother; I'll manage," said Elma.

The girls found themselves in the street.

"So you are going to get mother crab and lettuce for supper," cried Carrie. "Then I suppose after all you don't mean to give me money to buy stuff for a new dress?"

"Yes, I do, Carrie, if you'll only have patience. I said I would, and there's an end of it."

"But how have you got the money?"

"Never you mind; I have got it."

Carrie walked on, her spirits rose, and she began to talk in her high staccato voice, allowing each person who passed to hear what she was saying.

"This is Thursday," she said. "I shall get up at daylight to-morrow morning, and I shall cut out the dress and put it in hand. I am always home between four and five in the afternoon, so I can work at it again until late at night. Then on Saturday, thank goodness! there's a whole holiday. Oh, I shall manage to get it done by the evening, and Sam and I can have a jolly time together in the park on Sunday."

"We will buy the crab first," said Elma, "and then we can call at Macpherson's on our way home."

"They have sweet things at Macpherson's," said Carrie. "You really are a very good-natured old thing, Elma."

"I am glad you think so," said Elma, her lips parted in a slightly satirical smile.

Carrie, now beaming all over with good-humor, assisted in the choosing of the crab; she further volunteered to carry this luxury home, and suggested that radishes would be a great addition to the lettuce.

"Is there anything else you think mother would like?" asked Elma.

"Oh, a bottle of really good Guinness' stout," said Carrie.

"Capital, Carrie! Why, you are getting quite a head for housekeeping. We'll give mother such a good supper, and it will do her a world of good."

"Poor old dear, so it will," said jubilant Carrie.

Having purchased the materials for an appetizing meal, the girls now entered a large establishment which, being supported by people of extremely slender means, could only afford to indulge in the cheapest articles. Carrie desired the shopman to exhibit cheap materials in different shades of blue. She finally selected one, turquoise in color, and wonderfully pretty, which cost the large sum of sevenpence three-farthings per yard. She ordered the required length to be cut, and Elma took out her purse to pay for it.

She did not at all want her sister to see how many sovereigns that purse contained, and turned her back slightly as she laid one on the counter.

"Well, how you got it baffles me?" cried Carrie.

"Pray, don't speak so loud," said Elma; "they really will think that I stole it if you go on giving me those sort of staccato rises of your eyebrows. It's all the better for you; that soverign has got you a new dress."

"So it has, and you are an old darling," said Carrie. "I'll

tell Sam all about you on Sunday, Elma. By the way, what a good idea; wouldn't you like to come with us? There's Sam's cousin, Maurice, a capital fellow—Maurice Jones."

"Oh, no; don't speak of him," said Elma. She gave a shudder, and turned her head aside.

The materials for the dress were purchased, even down to the linings and buttons; and Carrie, holding her parcel tucked comfortably under her arm, started home, Elma accompanying her. Carrie was so excited and delighted with her dress that she had no time even to think of the wonderful problem as to how Elma had got the money.

When they reached the house Elma ran into the kitchen and prepared to dress the crab. She did so well, and when the dainty little meal was upon the table, ran upstairs to bring her mother down.

"Now, mother, get up at once," she said.

"Get up. Oh, I can't," said Mrs. Lewis; "I have got such a splitting headache."

"But the crab is downstairs, and I have dressed it myself, just in the way you like best. I have brought in a little cayenne pepper, too, for I know you don't care for crab without it; and the lettuce is wonderfully crisp and fresh, and there are some radishes. Oh, and Carrie reminded me that you would not care for crab without your stout."

"I know," said Mrs. Lewis in a plaintive voice; "your father would never allow me to touch crab or lobster without stout. Ah, but those good old days are gone!"

"Not quite, mother, for there is a bottle of Guinness's waiting at your disposal."

"Oh, is there?" said Mrs. Lewis. She raised herself on her elbow. "Then I think I'll go down," she said.

"Well, make yourself smart, mother. I shall be waiting for you, and so will Carrie."

CHAPTER IX.

THE HEAD-MISTRESS AND THE CABBAGE-ROSE.

Middleton School, which consisted of from six to seven hundred girls, was kept in a state of discipline not so much by punishments as by a very strict code of honor. There were certain things which no Middleton girl who respected herself would ever dream of doing. There were other things which she would do as a matter of course. For instance, she would uphold her school through thick and thin, allowing no outsider to run it down. To be a member of Middleton School insured her friendship with all the other girls in the school. The *esprit de corps* of this celebrated day school was exceptionally strong. Even in after-life its members met as friends, never forgetting that they were at one time school-

fellows in one of the best and most thorough colleges of learning in the whole of England.

As the fees for instruction were necessarily low, and as the school was therefore open to all classes of girls, from the very rich to those who had but limited means, a rule, and a very strong one, was that all money and class distinctions were to be absolutely abolished. The girls, so long as they belonged to the school, were absolutely on the same footing, notwithstanding the fact that their home-lives might be very far removed the one from the other. Among the most emphatic rules of the school—a rule which, if it were disobeyed, would cause ostracism on the part of the girls and the gravest reprimand, not to say a chance of expulsion, on the part of the teachers—was the borrowing of money. Money was supposed not to be mentioned between the girls; and as to a poor girl borrowing from a rich, it was considered about the blackest crime which could take place in Middleton School. Now, Elma, knew this fact perfectly well, and when she took the eight pounds from Kitty Malone she was aware of the grave risk which she ran. More depended on her keeping up a good character in the school than her companions were at all aware of. She was sent to Middleton School by an aunt who to a certain extent had adopted her—her mother could not possibly afford to pay the fees, small as they were.

Elma knew well as she lay down to sleep that night that if the little transaction between herself and Kitty were known she would be practically ruined for life. No other girl belonging to the school would lend money even if it were asked for, so strong was the feeling on this head; but Kitty knew nothing about it; she had not been long at Middleton, and the subject had not been mentioned to her. Elma sincerely trusted to Kitty's never alluding to it. Kitty had promised not to tell; and Elma believed, wild and erratic as she was, that when her word was once given, she would respect it. When she had asked Kitty to lend her money she had intended only to take half a sovereign; she wanted this in order to pay her subscription to the Tug-of-war Society; but when Kitty generously opened her purse and told her to help herself, the temptation had proved far too strong. Before she quite knew what she was doing she had taken eight sovereigns; had put herself absolutely into Kitty's power, and had run the chance of being ruined for life. Still, that first night she slept soundly, and awoke in the morning with a sense of bliss. She had still a little over seven sovereigns; not her own, and yet in one sense quite her own, for Kitty had said there was no hurry about the replacing of the money. Oh, yes, she was quite certain that no one would find out. She opened her sleepy eyes, yawned, and saw Carrie sitting at the window, busily employed cutting out her dress. Elma remarked crossly at the blaze of light.

"Oh, don't say you mind it, you old dear," cried Carrie. "I can't see unless I have plenty of light, and it's most im-

portant how I cut this sleeve. I mean it to be puffy and yet not too puffy, and the elbows must fit exactly in the right place. What a pity it is, Elma, that you and I are not the same sort of figure. I am nearly double as big as you. It would be so convenient if you could be my model: then I might fit my things like a glove. Ah, well, I suppose there's nothing perfect in the world."

Elma turned on her other side.

"If you talk to me any more," she said, "I shall become so cross as to be unbearable. Go on with your dress if you must, but don't speak."

Elma returned to the land of dreams, and Carrie cut and snipped, and basted and pinned, until it was time for her to go downstairs to breakfast. Elma got up at her usual hour, ate her breakfast with scarcely a remark, and started for school. When she got there the different members of the Tug-of-war Society were hanging about the doors. The school was not yet opened and the girls who belonged to the society nodded to one another and whispered and smiled. Among the party waiting at the door were Alice Denvers, Kitty Malone, and Bessie Challoner. Gwin Harley had not yet arrived. It was never Gwin's stately way to be either too early or too late for school; she generally appeared on the scene, driving up in her pretty little phaeton, just as the clock struck nine. The other girls always made way for this dainty little turnout, and Gwin would spring carelessly to the ground, give a direction to the smart tiger who sat behind, and who immediately took the reins, and then, turning with a gay nod to her companions, would enter the school with them.

Gwin was certainly the pride of the school. The girls who were not her absolute friends looked at her with awe, wonder, and admiration. The girls who were her friends bragged of the fact to their companions. It was a pleasure even to look at Gwin, for, although she never overdressed herself, she was always so wonderfully dainty—her neat little shoes, her lovely stockings, the fine quality of her cambric handkerchiefs, the delicate scent which clung to them, the glossy braids of her ever exquisitely arranged hair, and the very set of that perfectly plain sailor hat with its band of white ribbon, were all the acme of perfection. Oh, they all betokened wealth and taste, taste and wealth. No wonder the girls worshiped Gwin. She never boasted of her wealth; she never brought it prominently forward; but for all that it pervaded her from the top of her head to the point of her pretty bronze shoes.

Kitty now gave Gwin an earnest and longing look. There was a peculiar expression about Kitty's face: a sort of new, thoughtful look, as though something was worrying her and causing her to cudgel her brains to quite a remarkable extent. Kitty Malone had never yet been affected with shyness, nor was she shy now. Just as Gwin's carriage appeared and the

other girls made way for it as was their wont, and Elma approached quite close to Alice, meaning to make some remark to her, what she never afterward remembered, Kitty ran straight up to Gwin and clasped her by the hand.

"I want to say something to you very badly," she began.

"How do you do, Kitty?" answered Gwin in her pleasant high-bred voice. "You want to say something to me? But the bell has just rung; we must go into school."

"I mean after school," continued Kitty. "Can I walk with you during recess?"

"Oh, but please, Gwin," cried Elma at that point, "you promised to walk with me to-day; don't you remember?"

"Yes, and you promised to walk with me, Miss Harley," exclaimed a girl of the name of Marcia Tyndal.

"But it is so important, Gwin," pleaded Kitty, bringing that peculiar Irish quality into her voice which it was difficult to resist.

"Ah, now do, Gwin," she continued; "do let me walk with you just during this recess. The others may have you for every other recess until Christmas; but do let me be with you just for to-day."

"I think you must, Kitty," said Gwin. "Elma, you won't mind, will you? Marcia, you and I can have to-morrow instead of to-day; is it a bargain?"

"Oh, I don't mind," said Marcia Tyndal in a good-natured voice, shrugging her fat shoulders as she spoke.

Then the girls trooped into school, prayers began, and immediately afterward they all assembled at their different classes.

Kitty was restless and nervous, she could not settle to her work. She was more *disbrait* and inattentive even than usual. The younger girls, who delighted in her, and quite prided themselves on having her in their class, nudged her in vain.

"Kitty," whispered one little girl quite three years Kitty Malone's junior, "if you don't open your history book you won't have your lesson ready when Miss Worrick comes."

"Oh, I know all that stupid history," cried Kitty in a low voice. "Don't bother me, Annie, asthore. I can't be teased. I have got something in the back of my head."

"Something in the back of your head?" whispered Annie.

"Yes, yes; but hush, alanna! I can't let it out; it's bothering me entirely. There, if I must look at the stupid history, I must. What part are we doing, Mary Davies?"

"Oh, it's about Charles the First."

"Poor martyr! Shame to England to cut off his head!" Kitty bent over her book, but soon her erratic fancy had started off in another direction. She was sent to the bottom of the class when the history lesson came on, and was looked at with growing disfavor by Miss Worrick, a particularly painstaking and earnest young teacher.

"Really, Miss Malone, if this sort of thing goes on I must report you," she said. "It is pure inattention. If you wish

to take any position in the school you must make up your mind that while in school you must work."

"And while out of school I must play," retorted Kitty. "Ah, then, it's little of the play I get. If I had my share of the play I could do my share of work."

"Come, you must not answer me," said Miss Worrick. "Now sit down and read up that chapter in your history. You will not be allowed to go out during recess this morning."

"Not go out during recess?" cried Kitty in horror; "but it's most important. Ah, now, do let me out; just excuse me to-day, won't you? I'll be as good as gold to-morrow, and better; but excuse me to-day; please, please. Say you will; for I really must go. I was to meet Gwin Harley, the darling; and it's put out she would be awfully if I wasn't with her. You'll let me out to-day, won't you? Please say yes."

"I do not understand you, Miss Malone. When I say a thing I mean it. You are not to go out during recess."

Kitty's face fell; the cloud which had more or less hovered round her during the entire morning deepened. She sank into her seat with a heavy sigh.

"Never mind, Kitty; we all of us have to stay in sometimes," whispered little Mary Davies.

"Take a chocolate out of my pocket, darling, and don't talk to me any more," was Kitty's answer. "I am sad past bearing. Not to see Gwin when I had arranged it all; but I will, I must! There, take a second chocolate if you want it; they are full of cream. But just leave me to my own thoughts for a bit. I am so worried I don't know whether I am on my head or my heels."

"Silence, girls—no whispering!" called the mathematical teacher, who now came on the scene.

Poor Kitty's morning began badly, and it certainly was destined to go on badly. None of her lessons were prepared with the slightest care; she went down lower and lower in class, and each teacher gave her an imposition or some other punishment. When recess came she alone in the whole class was required to remain in the room.

The rest of the girls looked at her with pity.

"She's such an old dear, although quite the idlest and most ignorant person I ever came across," said Mary Davies to her companions.

"Yes," whispered another little girl with fat rosy cheeks and round eyes; "but did you ever taste such chocolate creams? Why, they must cost a half-penny apiece. I do love to sit next to her; she says I may dive my hand into her pocket as often as I like."

"Oh, she's an old love!" echoed all the girls; "but what a pity it is that she won't learn."

"She does not want to learn," said Mary Davies. "Learning would spoil her; she is a pet."

Meanwhile in the playground Gwin Harley waited in vain for Kitty to join her.

"Does any one know where Kitty Malone is?" she said, addressing one of the girls in Kitty's class.

"She is kept in for an imposition; she did not know her history, and Miss Worrick said she was to stay in," answered Mary Davies.

"Oh, well, I suppose I can see her another time," said Gwin. At that moment she met Elma's anxious eyes.

Elma was just about to dart to the side of her friend, when, to the amazement of all the girls, Kitty walked calmly across the playground.

"Oh Gwin, I must speak to you; it is about Alice. You know, you and Alice are great friends. Things get worse and worse, and they are almost past bearing. Last night I heard her sobbing in bed. She sobbed and sobbed, and at last I could stand no more of it, and sprang out of bed, and bent over her and said: 'Alice, is it about me you are crying?' and she said: 'Oh, yes, Kitty, it is'; and I said, 'And why 'Oh, yes, Kitty?' What has poor Kitty done to you?'

"'I am not happy,' answered Alice. 'Since you came everything has changed; you have made my home miserable to me. I don't like your ways.'

"'Have you made up your mind never to be friends with me?' I asked.

"'Yes,' said Alice. 'I wish you would go away.' She sat up in bed then with her tear-stained face and looked at me ever so earnestly. 'Tell mother that you would rather go to some other house—that you won't stay here. I never could stand vulgar girls, and you are one.'

"Oh Gwin, I felt so mad. You don't think me a vulgar girl, do you?"

"Tell me the whole," said Gwin in a low voice.

"Oh, there is not much more. Alice was in a regular temper. She buried her face in the clothes, and though I tried pinching her, and pulling her, and petting her even, not another word would she utter. Now, you must see for yourself, Gwin, that if this sort of thing goes on I shall have to return home, and then the old dad will be fretted, and he will think that I don't want to learn manners nor to get learning into me. Oh dear, I don't want to fret him, although I hate England. I have just been wondering if you would speak to Alice."

"Yes, certainly," answered Gwin. "I—" Her words were interrupted.

"Miss Malone, do I see you in the playground?" said a stern voice. Miss Worrick had appeared on the scene.

"Why, then, yes, Miss Worrick, you do. It's a fine day, isn't it; and the air's most refreshing," said Kitty in her most impertinent tones.

"Do you know that you have distinctly disobeyed me? I forbade you to leave the schoolroom during recess. How dared you do so?"

"There wasn't much daring about it. I walked to the door,

opened it, and came out. I had made a previous engagement, and it was not at all convenient to break it. I told you so at the time, did I not?"

For answer Miss Worrick took Kitty by the arm and led her across the playground.

"I must take you to Miss Sherrard," she said. "I cannot manage a disobedient girl like you."

She opened a side door, and, still holding Kitty by the arm, led her down a long passage and into a small room, where she desired her to wait while she fetched the head-mistress.

Miss Sherrard was a little woman, but she had a native dignity which is beyond and above all mere personal appearance. She had a keen and commanding eye, a somewhat pale face, an upright little figure. She was not only short in stature, but slight; nevertheless, there was not a mistress in the great school who did not hold her in awe as well as admiration, and not a girl, with the exception, perhaps, of Kitty Malone, who did not do her reverence.

When the door was shut behind Kitty, she drummed impatiently on the bare mahogany table near which she had been placed, then walked to the window and looked out. From her position she could catch a glimpse of Gwin Harley pacing up and down the playground with Elma Lewis. She saw Alice come up and talk to Gwin; she noticed that Gwin and Elma paused, then that Alice slipped to the other side of Gwin, and the three walked slowly up and down. As they walked they talked. Alice nodded her head once or twice; Elma made emphatic grimaces; Gwin alone looked quiet, calm, and stately.

"They are talking about me," thought the Irish girl, and an angry feeling rose in her heart. "Is it for this I have left the dear old dad, and the beautiful home, and the animals, and Aunt Bridget, and Aunt Honora! Oh, is it for this I have left dear Old Ireland, may her heart be blessed! to come here to be slighted, to be made little of, to be joked at! Am I Kitty Malone, or am I somebody else? Oh! my heart will break, my heart will break!"

"Miss Malone, I am sorry to hear this of you," said a very calm, very distinct, and withal very kind voice, just at Kitty's back. Kitty turned abruptly, and said aloud:

"Oh, and did you overhear me?" She then involuntarily dropped a courtesy to the head-mistress.

Miss Sherrard shut the door behind her.

"I am sorry," she began, "to learn from Miss Worrick that you are showing insubordination and disobedience."

"Why, then, now, and won't you let me tell my own story in my own way?" said Kitty.

In spite of herself, Miss Sherrard gave an involuntary smile. It soon vanished, but Kitty had caught the glint in the eye and the tremble round the lips. "Why, then I see at a glance that you have the kind heart," she said; "you

thought to keep it in, but I saw it breaking out just then. You'll let me tell my own story, won't you?"

"That seems fair enough," said Miss Sherrard. She seated herself as she spoke on one of the bare, comfortless chairs, and looked full up at Kitty.

Kitty was dressed according to Rule IV. of the Tug-of-war Society. She wore a decidedly fashionable dress, the sleeves well puffed out at the shoulders, fitting nicely at the elbows, and with ruffles of lace, real lace, round the wrists. Round Kitty's throat also there were ruffles of lace; the neck of her dress was cut a little low, showing the soft, full contour of her exquisitely-curved throat. Her waist was clasped with a belt of solid silver, and in front she wore a great bunch of cabbage-roses. The cabbage-rose has a scent which, when once it assails the nostrils, can never afterward be forgotten. Miss Sherrard, in spite of herself, gave a little sniff.

Quick as lightning Kitty saw it, and detached the bunch of roses from her belt.

"Now, will you have them?" she said. "Ah, do now, just to please me, Kitty Malone; they came all the way from Old Ireland this morning. Stay, I'll pin them into the front of your dress. Hold easy a moment, dear woman, and you'll have as neat a little bunch as ever you clapped your two eyes on."

Miss Sherrard could not help once again letting that ghost of a smile play round her lips, and then vanish.

"But really," she said—"oh, thank you for the roses; yes, they are very sweet; yes, delicious!" She bent her head and sniffed quite audibly.

"Ah, then, aren't they refreshing, and aren't they melting the anger down in your heart? Say they are now—say they are. You see you never had an out-and-out wild Irish girl to manage before. Well, and what is it you want with me? I'll be as civil as you please, and as willing to listen to the words of wisdom, if only you'll let me first tell my own story."

"It is only fair that you should be allowed to tell your own tale," said Miss Sherrard; "but please understand that I am very angry. Miss Worrick's story has amazed me. Do you know, Kitty Malone, of what you are accused?"

"Well, I do, and I don't; but I should like to hear the crime spoken of by your pretty lips. What is it? Something black of course; black things are always laid to the door of Kitty Malone."

"The crime, Miss Malone, is the very grave sin of disobedience. You must know that in a great school of this kind, if there were not perfect obedience there would be no order at all."

"True for you, it looks like it; but then, as far as I can see—and I have watched all the girls pretty closely of late—I am the only black sheep. Now, I should think that one black sheep in a great big orderly place of this kind would make a sort of diversion. You would all be after her, and joking at

her, and thinking which of you could get her under control. Well, I am the black sheep, and I suppose I am sorry."

"Don't talk any more, Kitty; listen to me."

"Yes; what is it?"

"You have been disobedient; you were very inattentive over your history lesson, not knowing it at all. Miss Worrick says, as a matter of fact, you did not even trouble to open your book, and when the time came for you to go through your lesson you were not able to answer a single question. For this extreme carelessness she desired you to stay in the schoolroom during morning recess. She said you pleaded hard that she would excuse you, not liking to take the punishment which you richly deserved; but Miss Worrick, very justly insisted on her word being obeyed. What, then, was her astonishment to see you in the playground walking calmly up and down with Gwin Harley."

"Yes, dear; and what else could you expect?" answered Kitty.

"What else could I expect? I don't understand."

"Well, was it likely now that I would stay in that close, stifling schoolroom when the sun was shining and there was a bird on a tree outside singing to me as loud as ever it could? And I had made an arrangement with Gwin Harley to walk up and down with her during recess, and the darling girl had put off two others for me, and was waiting for me. Don't you think it was about natural that I should disobey Miss Worrick, whom I never cared twopence for, and go out to Gwin Harley, whom I love? Of course I knew I was disobedient, and I supposed she would punish me; but I didn't think she would have me up for you to lecture me."

"You behaved very badly indeed," said Miss Sherrard; "and you are now talking in an extremely silly way."

Kitty bowed her head; the light went out of her eyes, her face turned pale.

"What punishment will you invent to torture me with?" she said at last in a low voice. "I suppose I have done wrong, and I am willing to take the punishment. What is it?"

"Of course you must be punished," said the head-mistress; "it would never do to allow disobedience in the school. You see, Kitty——"

"Oh, bless you, bless you for calling me by my Christian name," muttered Kitty Malone.

"Kitty, I am inclined to take you into my confidence."

"Are you, indeed? I declare you're an old dear!"

"You have come to school to learn, have you not?"

"Not a bit of it," answered Kitty; "I came to school to please the old dad."

"Your father?"

"Yes, the dear old dad, the dearest, the best in the world."

"But what did he send you here for?"

"Well, I suppose to get knowledge and manners. Ah, bad

luck to them! and I suppose also to tame me down a bit. He said he never could manage that at Castle Malone."

Miss Sherrard once more gave that faint involuntary smile.

"Your father sent you here," she said, "to put you under discipline. While you are in this school, my dear girl, you must obey me, and also the other teachers. If you are disobedient the other girls will be disobedient, and then where should we all be?"

"It would be a lark!" muttered Kitty, with sparkling eyes.

"Don't interrupt, and please listen. I should be very sorry to send you back to Castle Malone in disgrace. I should be sorry to have to write to your father in order to tell him that his Kitty, whom he loves—his bright, pretty, lovable daughter—can never learn manners nor accomplishments, nor be tamed in the very least. There are from six to seven hundred girls in this school, who all now know about your very daring act of disobedience. Were I not to punish you they would be astonished, and some of them might even go to the length of copying your behavior. You see this for yourself, don't you?"

"Oh, I see it plain enough," answered Kitty; "plain as a pikestaff. What's the punishment to be?"

Miss Sherrard hesitated. Once more she looked at Kitty; Kitty's eyes were as bright as stars.

"You need not be afraid," said the pupil in an encouraging voice. "I am nothing of a coward; I'll take anything in reason. Is it a flogging you are thinking of ordering for me?"

"Oh, no; we never flog in this school," said Miss Sherrard in a shocked voice.

"Why, then, if it is something in the shape of learning a lesson it will go cruel with me. I don't care for learning, and——"

"I am afraid, Kitty, that I must give you the kind of punishment which all the school may know about. All the school now knows of your disobedience, and it must also be well aware of your punishment."

"Good gracious! this sounds exciting," answered Kitty. "I am to have a punishment that all the school will know about."

"Yes, it is this. To-morrow morning, just before recess, you are to go up to Miss Worrick, and tell her before the entire school that you are sorry you disobeyed her; you are then to offer to stay in during the play hour."

"If that's all," said Kitty, "it is not much of a bother. I am to say I am sorry, and I am to stay in to-morrow. You won't object to my bringing——"

"I'll hear of no conditions," answered Miss Sherrard, starting to her feet. "Go away now, my dear girl, and please remember that your father sent you here to learn, that I trust you will learn, and that you will also endeavor to be good to—to please me, Kitty."

Kitty's eyes filled with sudden tears.

"You are very kind," she murmured. "I know I should soon learn to love you. You wouldn't mind letting me give you a hug, would you?"

"I will certainly kiss you, dear, but no demonstration, please. Kitty, I know you have a warm heart; but don't let it lead you into mischief. There is much for you to learn in England, as I doubt not there would be much for an English girl to learn in your country."

"Ah, but it is the dearest land in all the world," said Kitty.

"I am sure it is to you; but say no more now. I will speak to Miss Worrick; she will expect you to do what I have desired to-morrow."

CHAPTER X.

PADDY WHEEL-ABOUT.

THE next day there was a whisper through the school that Kitty Malone was about to do public penance. She had already made more or less sensation in that part of the school where she worked. In her own class the girls, as has already been stated, adored her; but the other girls also looked at her with interest. They admired her dress, her free, careless gait, her upright, erect figure, and the bright, happy glance in her eyes. They all thought her charming, and the expression of her face was often so comical, the shrug of her shoulders so ludicrous, that at a glance she set the girls tittering.

On this special occasion she sat down between her favorite Mary Davies and Agnes Moore, and whispered to the former:

"Ah, then, darling, it is not your place I'll be taking to-day; sure my head is bothered entirely. But I have got all kinds of nice things about me. Do you know that I sat up late last night putting a pocket in the left side of my dress as well as the right, so now the girl on each side of me can have as many chocolates as she has a fancy for? You dive in your hand whenever you feel the least bit inclined for a sweetie, Agnes; and you do the same, Mary Davies; and, Mary, you might pass one on now and then to that poor, little, thin Katie Trafford at the other end of the class."

It was certainly impossible for a girl like Kitty Malone not to be popular; and the other girls valued her, and thought themselves highly privileged to be in the same class with her, dunce as she was.

Kitty had learned her lessons a little better, but the thought of the public confessions which she was about to make rested heavy on her soul. It made her restless; and her lessons, although they had been better prepared, gained her no more marks than on the previous day.

"I wonder how I ought to do it," she whispered more than once to Agnes Moore.

"To do what?" asked Agnes, who was a very earnest little student, and whose dream was that she might get a remove

at the end of the term." "About what, Kitty? I wish you would not interrupt me."

"Oh, bother it, dear. Have a chocolate, won't you? What are your lessons compared to my perplexities? What ought I to say? Ought I to drop a courtesy or go on my knees? There was an old romance which I found in the garret at home; and when the heroine did wrong she always dropped upon her knees and folded her hands, and raised her eyes toward heaven—is that the way I ought to do it?"

"Don't, don't, Kitty; you'll make me laugh, and then I'll be sent down. Please, don't talk to me any more."

Kitty turned her attention to Mary Davies.

"Would you, Mary, go on one knee or on two? If you dip your hand down to the very bottom of my pocket, you'll find some caramels—some people like them better than chocolate creams."

"You must not talk to me any more or I'll get into disgrace," whispered Mary in a low, frightened voice. "Look, Miss Worrick has come into the room. Now do open your history book, there's a dear girl."

Kitty bent her curly head over her book. She was really interested in the cruel fate of the martyr-king, but at that moment she saw nothing but the picture she was conjuring up each moment before her excited imagination—the tall girl asking pardon of the little teacher. Was the girl to go on her knees?

"It really would be better," thought Kitty. "I'd be lower than her then. It does seem ridiculous that the big should ask pardon of the little, and— Oh, Miss Worrick, I beg your pardon; were you speaking to me?"

"I was, Kitty. Stand up; I am just going to lecture."

The history lesson began. Kitty did no better than yesterday. It came to an end. The mathematical teacher took her class, and then the great bell was rung for recess. Just at the moment when its last note echoed through the vast school Miss Worrick came a step forward into the room, and held up her hand to arrest the movement of the classes. She looked at Kitty with an expectant expression. Kitty returned her gaze, and said nothing. Kitty Malone felt glued to her seat. For a moment every nerve seemed paralyzed, her face became crimson, her eyes filled with ready tears, she looked down, the great tears splashed upon the desk before her. At that instant she encountered the vindictive and delighted glance of Alice Denvers.

Kitty had confided all her trouble to Alice on the previous night, and Alice at the time had pretended to give a little sympathy; but where was her sympathy now?

"I hate her," thought the Irish girl. "No one else would be glad to see me so miserable."

"You have something to say to me, have you not, Miss Malone?" said Miss Worrich in her stiff, precise voice.

Kitty staggered to her feet.

"I don't want to say it a bit," she grumbled.

"Come forward, my dear; come forward."

Kitty left the protection of her desk, and staggered across the room. Miss Worrick had mounted a little platform, all the other teachers stood waiting, and the girls waited also. Kitty looked round, the eyes in each face seemed multiplied fourfold—the room seemed to be all eyes. She longed for the mountains, for her father, for Laurie, for the old home. She hated the school, she hated England. Why was she to be publicly disgraced?

"Oh, it is very wrong indeed to ask me to do it," she cried. Then the following words rushed out: "Miss Worrick, I am sorry I disobeyed you yesterday, and I'll stay in class to-day. Yes, I will stay; but I hate every one of you, and I hate England, and I wish I was back again in dear Old Ireland. Oh, dear! oh, dear! oh, dear! Why was I ever sent into this horrid, cold, freezing land? Oh, my heart is broken! my heart is broken!"

Kitty's sobs were distinctly heard across the great schoolroom. She returned to her seat. Miss Worrick with a wave of her hand dismissed the rest of the girls. Kitty bent her head low down upon the desk before her, and sobbed louder and louder. At last she felt a hand resting lightly on her shoulder.

"I know I did it dreadfully, Miss Worrick," she said; "but it was so bad. Why did you make me, why did you make me?"

"There, Kitty, it is over now, and you will never disobey your teacher again as long as you live," said a kind voice, and Kitty raised her eyes to see, not the face of Miss Worrick, but that of the head-mistress.

"Oh, Miss Sherrard, how could you make me do it?" she sobbed. "It wasn't in me. None of the Malones could beg anybody's pardon, and I couldn't go on my knees when the moment came because they felt stiff, they had no joints in them. I could not do it properly; no, I could not."

"You did it, dear, but not very well. You did it, however, and you have learned your lesson. Now come with me into my private sitting-room. You and I will have lunch together, and I will excuse you from any more lessons to-day."

Kitty Malone never forgot that next hour. Miss Sherrard was an ideal head-mistress. She had the keenest sympathy with girls. In her long experience she had met girls of every shade of character, the bold, the ambitious, the timorous, the idle, the frivolous, the noble, the earnest. She knew all about the Christian girl as well as the pagan girl; all about the girl who had a terrible battle with her own evil propensities, and the girl whose nature was so amiable, so gentle, so sweet, that life would be comparatively easy for her. But although she had been head-mistress of the great Middleton School now for several years, she had never before met quite such an extraordinary specimen as Kitty Malone. Where,

however, others would see nothing but a spirit of frivolity, a love of admiration, dress, pleasure, in Kitty, Miss Sherrard peeped below the surface and discovered some really noble qualities. She determined to be very gentle to this wild, willful girl—to take her, in short, as she was.

"Oh, I wonder you care to speak to me," said Kitty, when her sobs having ceased, she stood looking half-repentant, half-rebellious in Miss Sherrard's private room.

"You are not to be the subject of our conversation at all for the present, Kitty," said Miss Sherrard. "Lunch is ready, and you must be hungry. Would you like to go into my room—it is just next to this—and wash your hands and brush out your hair?"

Kitty looked at Miss Sherrard's small and beautifully-kept hands. She was fastidious to a remarkable degree about her personal appearance.

"I dare say my hair is somewhat untidy," she said. "I might as well take a squint at myself in the glass. I never like to look ugly. Is my nose very red, Miss Sherrard?"

"Never mind about your appearance," said Miss Sherrard, who could not help feeling slightly annoyed at what she considered such a very irrelevant remark.

"I expect I am a sight," said Kitty, standing up and talking half to herself and half for the benefit of the head-mistress. "Crying always spoils me. Now, I knew a girl at home, and the more she cried the prettier she got. She used to let her tears roll down her cheeks in great drops, and never attempted to wipe them away, and her nose never got red, and her eyes only got bigger and quite dewy. Now, as to me when I cry, my nose——"

"Kitty, will you please remember that I am waiting for lunch," interrupted Miss Sherrard.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, ma'am," answered Kitty. She ran into the next room, examined herself critically in the glass, arranged her hair, dipped her hands into hot water, and came back looking spruce, bright, pretty, and once more restored to the highest good-humor.

"I said yesterday that I would love you, ma'am," she said, as she seated herself at the other side of the appetizing board. "Oh! what a dear little pie! I wonder is it pigeon pie."

"No, it is lamb pie," answered Miss Sherrard. "Will you help yourself?"

Kitty cut herself a generous slice.

"I like all sorts of good things," she said. "I am sure I was meant to do nothing in life but dress well, and look pretty, and have the nicest food to eat, and——"

"How dare you?" interrupted Miss Sherrard. Her words coming firm and strong, the expression on her kind face arrested the idle girl's silly remarks.

"What do you mean?" asked Kitty.

"I mean this, Miss Malone, that you are a girl with a considerable amount of ability——"

"Oh, now that I have not got."

"With a considerable amount of ability," continued Miss Sherrard, "and with a great many talents."

"Talents! I thought talents meant genius. Now, I have always and always been told that I was a dunce of the dunces. It's not joking me you are, is it, Miss Sherrard?"

"No, Kitty; I am in very sober earnest. You have been sent to me to make something of you."

"Well, my dear woman, I am afraid you won't make much. The fact is, I am wild through and through. I come of a wild stock. I wish you could see us at home, and Laurie, and——"

"You must tell me about your home afterward," said Miss Sherrard. "But now I have something to say about yourself."

As she spoke, Miss Sherrard drew her cup of coffee to the side of the table, leaned back, and looked fixedly into the bright and lovely face of the girl who sat opposite her.

"You have read your Bible, have you not?" she said.

"My Bible!" cried Kitty. "Yes; I read it every day."

"I am glad to hear that."

"Why, you don't suppose we are a lot of heathens at Castle Malone, do you, Miss Sherrard? Father has prayers every morning, and we all troop in, every one of us, into the big hall. Oh, I wish you could see the hall, and the pictures of my ancestors, and——"

"Afterward you shall tell me about them," interrupted Miss Sherrard. "So you do read your Bible every day. Then I dare say you happen to know the beautiful story, or rather parable, spoken by Christ himself about the talents?"

"Yes, I love that story; only I don't think it applies specially to me, for I have not got any."

"Have not you? Perhaps I can find that you have."

Kitty gazed at her mistress very earnestly.

"What is it I am good in?" she asked after a pause. "Is it my English? Bless you, they tell me it's awfully Irish."

"It certainly is, Kitty."

"Then, I don't know any music, although I can sing and whistle. Oh, I can whistle anything. There's not an air that Laurie plays (it's he that has the genius for music, bless the boy)—but there's not an air he plays that I can't whistle it right up and down, and with variations too."

"Yes, my dear, yes; but I was not thinking of this special talent. Now, let me tell you something that you have got."

"What? Please speak."

"You have plenty of money."

"I never thought that was a talent," cried Kitty.

"I should think it a very great and responsible talent. You have been given that money to do something for God. He wants you to use it for Him. Then, also, you have a very bright, attractive, loving manner."

"Oh, I feel every word I say. It's not manner," said Kitty. "You don't suppose I'm a hypocrite, do you?"

"No, I think on the contrary you are very sincere. We will now admit that you have got two talents; you have got money and you have got a pleasant manner. I think also that you have got a third, and I may be able to prove to you that you have got a fourth."

"Dear me, this is most entertaining!" exclaimed Kitty. "So I have really got two talents, and you think I have more. What is the third?"

"I don't wish to make you vain; but you have—yes, I must tell you—a remarkably pretty face."

"Ah, now, what a darling you are! I always thought you were sweet. What part of me do you admire most, the eyes or the mouth? I have the real Irish eyes I know—gentian-blue, yes, that's the color—and my eyelashes—aren't they long?"

"We need not discuss your beauty piece by piece," said Miss Sherrard. "You are pretty, and I am willing to admit it. Now, a bright face like yours, with an attractive manner, is a gift. Then, besides, you have—you will be astonished when I say this—lots of becoming dress, which adds to the charm of your appearance. Kitty, if you were all you might be—if you would use that money which God has given you, that beauty which God has given you, that attractive manner which God has given you, all for His service—why, you could do a great deal in the world. You could make it a better place, a brighter place, a happier place. Now, my dear child, your father has trusted you to me. He wrote to me a great deal about you before you came to Middleton School——"

"Dear old dad!" cried Kitty.

"He loves you with all his heart."

"I should think so, the darling blessed man—may the saints preserve him!"

"As your father feels so strongly about you, and as I promised him to do what I could for his child, will you help me, Kitty? Will you remember that you are equipped for the battle of life much more bravely, much more strongly than most of the other girls in Middleton School? Use your beauty for Him, dear; use your attractive manner for Him."

"You make me feel very solemn," said Kitty. She rose. "I will and try think about it," she said. "I wish I was not quite such a giddypate; but I'll try and think about it."

Miss Sherrard kissed her.

"And now I want you to do something more," she said. "You won't be able to be a better girl than you were in the past if you don't pray to God to help you; and when you pray, Kitty, ask Him to teach you to restrain your feelings a little, not to let them all rush to the surface, to keep a little back. Thus you will gain strength of character, and—and be all the better for it, my child."

"You are very good to me," said Kitty. "I don't mind what I do for those I love. I suppose now you would wish me to learn my lessons perfectly every day?"

"I certainly should."

"And to—to turn poor little Agnes Moore from the head of her class?"

"Well, Kitty, I cannot say anything about that. If you do better work than Agnes Moore you will get to the head of the class and she will go down; but I doubt your being able to do so, for Agnes is a very clever and a very diligent little pupil. But I want you, dear, soon to get out of that class, for it is a great deal too young for you. I want you to be with girls of your own age. We are yet one month to the end of the term. By the end of term I want to be able to tell you that you have got a remove. And now, dear, good-by. Remember, I shall watch you, and—yes, I shall pray for you."

"You are very good to me," repeated Kitty; and she walked out of Miss Sherrard's presence with her head lowered, and a mist before her eyes.

For the next few days Kitty was strangely thoughtful. She did not speak nearly so much as usual, she felt inclined to go away by herself, and she was much puzzled about her talents. Miss Sherrard's words had made quite a deep impression. She learned her lessons with care, and had every chance, so her teachers told her, of a remove at the end of term. Even Alice found less to say against her. Kitty began to look on her school life as something roseate and delightful; but all these things were to come to a speedy end.

On a certain afternoon she got home to find Alice out and Mrs. Denvers seated in the drawing-room with a great basket of mending before her.

"Oh, what a lot of work! Would you like me to help you?" said Kitty.

"Very much, dear; but what kept you so late? Oh, here is a letter for you."

"A letter!" cried Kitty eagerly. "Oh, it is from Laurie. Hurrah! hurrah!"

She forgot all about her offer to help Mrs. Denvers with her darning, tossed the letter in the air two or three times, and then sank down on the nearest ottoman to read it. These were the words on which her eyes rested:

"DEAR OLD KITTERKINS: I have got into the greatest bother of a mess that ever assailed a poor gossoon, and if you can't help me, old girleen, well, I shall be done brown, as the saying is. The whole matter concerns Paddy Wheel-about. The poor creature has been getting queerer and queerer lately, and father has been ever so much worried about him. I didn't know a word of this, mind you, at the time, but learnt it afterwards; and it makes my bit of a frolic all the blacker, I can tell you. Father got Dr. Milligan to go and see Paddy

in his cabin at the top of Sleeve Nohr, and the doctor said that the poor old boy was going off his head as fast as he could, and we must be careful not to give him any shock. Well, but to come to my part of it. You know that coat of his, and what diversion we have had out of it from time to time? You made one of the patches yourself, don't you remember, Kitty? We always told him that in each patch he had concealed a sovereign. Well, hot as the days are, he has been wearing that coat, and a figure of fun he did look. The Mahoney boys and Pat and I thought we would take a rise out of him; so one night when he was asleep we stole up to his lair and got hold of the precious coat. We bundled it up and were off with it. We had to cross the lake, in the old boat with a hole in the bottom, in order to get home in time, and what do you think happened? Up came a squall, the boat was upset, and Paddy's coat sank to the bottom of the lake. We swam to the shore and thought it would be an easy matter to fish up the old coat on the following morning; but although we dragged and dragged, and Pat and I both dived down to the bottom a good dozen of times, the coat had sunk in the deep mud and we could not find it, no nor a sign of it. Well, of course, our one hope was that no one should know; but what was our horror to be confronted by no less a person than Wheel-about himself. You know that craze he has about never speaking. Well, he spoke to us and pretty sharp too, and told us he knew we had taken the coat, and didn't he look thunders and daggers at us, and we funked it so awfully—yes, I will confess it, Kits, your brave Laurie funked it like anything—for Wheel-about did really look like a madman; at last there was no help for it—we had to out with the truth. Oh, didn't he raise a yell louder than anything you ever heard, and then I told him that if I could not get back the coat I would give him ten pounds for certain by Saturday next. He said if I did he would lie quiet for a bit and not tell the governor, so I want you like a blessed girleen to lend me the money. Send it off the very instant you read this; for if you don't the saints alone know what will happen. We are certain to be sent to a school in England, at least I am. From what you tell me, Kitterkins, of that place, I should think it would break our hearts to smithereens. Now look sharp and send the money. Your loving brother,

"LAURIE."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Kitty starting to her feet. "Do you mind my going out at once, Mrs. Denvers?"

"Certainly not, my love. Tea will be ready at five o'clock. Are you going far?"

"Only to Elma Lewis' house. I want to see her; it is awfully important."

"But Elma lives quite two miles from here."

"Oh, that does not matter. I am sure to find my way. It is most urgent," said Kitty.

She rushed out of the room, pinned on her hat, and a moment later was walking down the street as fast as she could go. She crossed a field and a common, and after a time got into that part of the town where Elma lived. By dint of asking half a dozen children and three or four policemen she at last reached Constantine Road, and presently found the right house. She ran up the steps and sounded a rattling rat-tat on the knocker. The moment she did so a girl with a mop of untidy red hair peeped up at her from the area below.

"Come and open the door at once," called Kitty. "Why do you keep a lady waiting?"

The girl soon appeared, tying on her cap and apron as she did so.

"I thought as they was all out for the day," she began. "Oh, miss, I beg your pardon."

Kitty, notwithstanding her rather rude words, presented a very charming spectacle as she stood on the steps. She was dressed not only in the height of the fashion, but wore such a perfectly captivating little toque at the back of her head as to fire the fancy and take the little wit which she possessed out of Mrs. Lewis' maid-of-all-work.

Maggie had never seen anything so captivating nor so ravishing. A wild desire to make a toque like it to put on her own touseled locks on the following Sunday caused her to stare so hard at Kitty with her mouth wide open that she did not hear a word that young lady was saying.

"Are you in a dream?" asked Kitty Malone. "I want to see Miss Elma Lewis. Is she at home?"

"Miss Helma? No, miss, that she ain't," replied Maggie. "Oh, I beg your pardon, miss; but it's—it's the bonnet at the top of your head."

"My bonnet?" said Kitty.

"Yes, miss. Oh, I do beg your pardon, miss—I was took all of a heap. Yes, miss, I'm attending now. But oh, if you would just turn your head a little."

"You must be mad," said Kitty. But her eyes began to sparkle.

"Do listen to me," she continued; "it's most important. Is Miss Elma not at home?"

"No, miss; she's out for the day, and so is the missus and Miss Carrie. They're all out a-pleasuring in their different ways, and they has left me at home to drudge. I'm the household drudge, miss, and no wonder I'm took with anything so pretty. Do you mind telling me, miss, if them wiolets is real?"

"Oh, the violets in my toque—are those what you are staring at?" said Kitty. "Well, now, I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll give you the whole bunch if you'll let me come into the house and write a letter to Elma, and if you'll further faithfully promise that you will give it to her the instant she comes home."

"To be sure I will, miss. Come right along in. Oh, what a beautiful young lady you is!"

"Every one tells me I am beautiful," thought Kitty. "It really is very pleasant. I am more flattered here than I was in Ireland. People told me there I had a face like cream and roses, or cream and strawberries, and father used to say that I had washed it in the fairies' dew, and Laurie would tell me that I was a bouncing girl and no mistake; but then Aunt Honora was always saying: 'Kitty dear, beauty is only skin deep, and don't be set up by it, child. Handsome is that handsome does, Kitty.' Oh, how she would deave me with that old proverb. But here they seem to think beauty is a talent, and I ought to be desperately proud of it. Oh, faith, but why do I think of these things when my precious duck of a Laurie is in the mess he has got into. He go to England to break his heart, the darling! Not a bit of it; not while his Kitty has her wits about her."

Meanwhile Maggie conducted this ravishing and welcome visitor into the tiny sitting-room, furnished her with pen, ink, and paper, and then began to hover about near the door in order to get another view of the lovely cap.

Kitty bent her head over the sheet of paper and indited a letter in hot and furious haste:

"DEAR ELMA: I am so sorry, but I must ask you to return that eight pounds to me immediately. I want it for Laurie. He has got into trouble and requires it; so don't keep me waiting a single minute if you can help it. I am so sorry you are out; but will you bring it to me the instant you return home? It is of the most vital importance. I am in dreadful trouble, and nothing else will save Laurie. Yours in great haste,

KITTY MALONE."

Having written the letter, Kitty looked round for an envelope; Maggie also searched to right and left, but could not find one.

"But it will be all right, miss," she said. "I'll lay it just as it is flat out on the table, and Miss Helma will see it the moment she comes in.'

"Thank you," answered Kitty. "And now I must go. Be sure you give it to her the instant she returns, and tell her to come straight to me with the money, for I must send it off to-night whatever happens. It is a money transaction; and you understand, don't you? What is your name?"

"Maggie, miss."

"Well, you understand, Maggie, that any transaction connected with money is very important."

"Like the Bank of England, miss?"

"Yes, to be sure, and——"

"Oh, miss, forgive me; but you promised me them wiolets."

"To be sure I did."

Kitty snatched them from her toque, flung them to Maggie, who caught them in an ecstasy, and a moment later was running home as fast as she could.

CHAPTER XI.

IN CARRIE'S BEDROOM.

Of the Lewis family the first who came home that special evening was Carrie. She walked straight into the little sitting-room, where Kitty Malone's letter lying on top of the blotter immediately attracted her attention. It need not be said that she instantly read it, and not only once but twice.

"Ha! ha! Elma, I have got you into my power at last," she said to herself. "So that accounts for the money. Now, what did you borrow it from that queer Irish girl for? But now that I know a thing or two, I may be able to draw on you to a considerable extent. Return it! not you—you are not likely to; but I think I'll be able to frighten you. I shall certainly do my utmost."

It will be seen from these remarks that Carrie was by no means an amiable girl. She ran up to her room, took off her hat, and surveyed herself in the pale blue dress which had been purchased with some of poor Kitty's money. She then returned to the sitting-room, and folding up the letter, deliberately put it into her pocket. As she was doing so Maggie came in to lay the tea.

"Oh, lor! Miss Carrie," cried the maid-of-all-work as she spread the not-too-clean cloth upon the table, "whatever 'as become of that bit of writin' that was lyin' atop of the blotter here?"

"What bit of writing?" asked Carrie, turning calmly round and surveying her.

"Oh, a letter, miss; I don't know what was in it, but it was a money transaction, as important as the Bank of England, and it was to be given to Miss Helma the very instant she come 'ome. Didn't you see it, miss, when you come in?"

"No, I didn't," said Carrie promptly. "I saw no letter of any kind. Here's the blotter, there is nothing on it. It may have got between the folds, however." She took up the thick pad of blotting-paper and shook it, but no letter dropped out.

"There," she said. "I have not the least doubt that Fido jumped on the table and took it up and ate it."

"Oh, lor! miss, you don't think so?"

"I should not be surprised. Fido can never resist paper; he is always pulling it about and chewing it."

Maggie looked frantically under the table for even stray pieces of the letter, but she could not find any.

"If he had ate it," she said at last, fixing Carrie with a very determined stare—"if he had ate it he would have left some bits about. I don't believe it; I believe you'as took it, Miss Carrie. Oh, miss, for shame; and it was as important

as the Bank of England—a money transaction, miss, what ought not to be trifled with. I can't read writin', though I can read books fair enough; but the young lady was awful put about it."

"What young lady?" asked Carrie. "You had better tell me everything."

"Oh, it was that Irish young lady, Miss Malone. She come here with the most beautiful 'at on (no, it was wot they calls a talk), and the wiolets in it they might 'av growed, I could a'most smell 'em; and she come in distracted like, and writ the letter, and told me I was to give it to Miss Helma the very moment she returned, and that Miss Helma was to take her the money to-night—what money is more than I can tell, for I didn't think Miss Helma ever had any. And she said it was an important transaction. And I said, 'Is it like the Bank of England, miss?' and she said, 'Yes, to be sure.' Why, Miss Carrie, you have not gone and hid the letter, 'ave you? That would be real mean of you."

"Look here," said Carrie; "what did you say about those violets?"

"Why, she gave 'em to me, miss; she took 'em out of her cap, and she gave 'em to me, and I was to give the letter to Miss Helma. It was a fair and honest bargain, and I must keep my part of it, miss."

"Would you like some roses to put with the violets?" said Carrie, making a careful calculation.

"Roses, miss? That would be prime, and very seasonable, wouldn't they, miss?"

"Yes, violets and roses look very pretty together, and I'll pin them into your hat and furbish it up. And, look here, Maggie, you can go out with your young man on Sunday. I'll manage it—I can. I will stay at home."

"Oh, Miss Carrie, you don't mean it?"

"Yes, I do. I'll manage it; but I'll do it only on a condition."

"What is that, miss?"

"That you don't ever ask me another question with regard to that letter, and that you never, never on any account breathe a word of it to Elma. If you do, why——"

"Oh, miss, it don't seem fair."

Poor honest Maggie walked to the window and struggled for a few minutes with her temptation. The thought, however, of roses to add to the violets, the thought also of Joe, whom she dearly loved, to walk with her on the following Sunday, proved far too seductive. She struggled with her enemy for a few minutes, and then she fell once and for all.

"I'll have the roses, Miss Carrie. I can't resist them and the thought of Joe on Sunday. Joe is so passionate loving, miss, I can't resist 'im." And then Maggie rushed out of the room.

She flew to her attic, threw herself by the side of her bed and burst into sobs.

"But I oughtn't to 'ave done it," she said several times—"I oughtn't to 'ave done it. If it worn't for the roses and for Joe I'd 'ave stood up to her; but as it is I was too tempted. But all the same I oughtn't to 'ave done it—no, I oughtn't to 'ave done it!"

Meanwhile Carrie up in her bedroom was thinking hard. Here indeed was a revelation! So Elma possessed eight pounds, or nearly eight—for Carrie knew that her blue dress, and the lobster, and the lettuces, and the stout had not cost a great deal of that valuable sum of money.

"At the present moment," she concluded, making a careful computation in her mind, for she was a smart enough girl in certain ways—"at the present moment Elma must possess the sum of seven pounds or thereabout. What in the world did that Irish girl lend it to her for? What an utter fool she must have been! But as to Elma's paying it back! as to Elma's getting rid of those riches—Carrie thought she saw her way of preventing that. In order to do so, however, it was all-important that Elma should not see poor Kitty's passionate little appeal to her; for although Elma was anything but an amiable girl, Carrie was certain that mere fright would make her return the money.

Carrie stayed some time in her room; she was thinking out a plan. How could she prevent Elma returning the money to Kitty Malone? She considered rapidly. Never before had she felt so full of energy and of resource; it suddenly occurred to her as extremely unlikely that Elma would carry about so much money on her person. Suppose she, Carrie, had a thorough good hunt for it now on the spot. Suppose she found it, then would it not be her duty, by taking possession of it, to guard Elma from giving it away? Carrie made up her mind quickly; she determined to have a search for the money at once. In the somewhat meagerly-furnished bedroom there were not a great many hiding-places, and Carrie began her search systematically. Elma and she had a little set of drawers each; there were no locks to these drawers. With all her faults, Elma absolutely trusted her own family. It never occurred to her even in her worst moments that Carrie would examine her drawers; she also believed that Maggie was perfectly honest.

Carrie now began to search. She opened Elma's drawers and looked through them. Soon she found what she sought for. In the small right-hand drawer at the top corner was a little parcel. It felt heavy. Carrie opened it and there lay seven shining sovereigns. There were also a couple of shillings and a few pence; but Carrie's eyes were principally fixed upon the sovereigns. Bright and new they looked, alsot as if they had just come from the mint. Carrie danced a pirouette there and then.

"I have found the treasure," she gasped. "Now I must take it where it will be safe. I know what I'll do. I'll give it to Sam Raynes to keep for Elma. It will be a nice excuse

for seeing him again, and I'll tell him it is money of my own, and ask him to bank it for me. He'll be ever so pleased; he will think all the more of me if he supposes I am wealthy. Yes, I'll take it to Sam; he shall keep it for me."

Flushed, excited, her heart beating high, Carrie once more pinned on her hat. She ran downstairs. As she passed through the hall her mother was letting herself in with a latchkey.

"My dear Carrie," she said, "you are not going out again at this hour of night?"

"I shan't be long, mother. I am just going into Summer Terrace to see the Raynes."

"I wish you would not go out so late, Carrie; it really isn't——"

But Carrie had slammed the door without even waiting for her parent's last words. She soon reached the Terrace, which was within three minutes' walk of her own house. Florrie Raynes let her in.

"My dear Carrie," she said, "what do you want? Oh, you naughty girl; you knew Sam would be in."

"Well, I want to speak to him. Can I see him just for a moment?" gasped Carrie, panting and breathless, pushing the hair from her forehead as she spoke.

"Yes, come right in," said Florrie; "you need not apologize. He is only having a cigar, and he'll be right pleased to see you."

As she spoke she opened the door of a small sitting-room and pushed Carrie in, slamming it behind her. The echo of her rude laughter as she performed this unladylike feat was heard down the passage.

Sam was seated in front of an open window smoking a cigar. When he saw Carrie he removed it from his mouth and came forward in a somewhat nonchalant way to meet her.

"Now, Car," he said, "what's up? Any news? Can we have a jolly time next Sunday?"

"Yes," answered Carrie panting slightly, "and for as many other Sundays as you like. See here, Sam, I cannot wait a minute now. You know you once told me that I was a frivolous little thing, that I was extravagant, and all that. Now, what will you say if I ask you to put seven pounds in the bank for me?"

"Seven pounds!" cried Sam; "'pon my word! Where in the world did you get it, Car?"

"It's out of my savings," replied Carrie.

"Well, I must say—" Sam gave her a look of the broadest admiration he had ever yet bestowed upon her.

"You can bank it for me, can you not?"

"Yes, that I can. But I say, Car, would you like me to speculate with it? I might double it, you know."

"Oh, do what you like with it, only keep it safe," answered Carrie. "I shall want to draw a little of it from time

to time. Now, good-bye, Sam. I can't wait another moment."

She laid the money on the table. Sam's large and somewhat fat hand closed greedily over it, and the next moment it was conveyed to his waistcoat pocket.

"This will come in very handy for myself," he muttered; but Carrie did not hear the words—she ran home breathless and excited. She thought she had managed splendidly.

CHAPTER XII.

THE "SPOTTED LEOPARD."

KITTY was miserable that night. An Irish girl has always her ups and downs. She is either up in the seventh heaven of bliss, or she is down almost below the ordinary earth in misery. Kitty was suffering from intense revulsion of spirits. Laurie was in trouble. He was the best brother in all the world; he was Kitty's idol. There never was anybody more reckless, more passionate, more dare-devil than Laurie Malone; and Kitty had always been with him heart and soul, always from the time that they had been little tots together. And now Laurie was in danger. The best broth of a boy might be condemned to go to a school in England; he might be condemned to the misery, the want of freedom, which she was now enduring. Oh, she must save him at any risk. She could do so. She could send him ten pounds; she would have exactly that sum in her possession if only Elma returned the eight which she had lent her. It did not occur to Kitty as at all difficult for Elma to return the money. She had never yet known money difficulties herself; and when Elma had asked for the loan of it she imagined that she could have it back at any time. If this was not the case it would not greatly matter; but now, of course, Laurie's letter altered the complexion of everything.

Kitty was too unsettled and anxious to stay quiet for a single moment. She fidgeted Alice, who was busily engaged preparing her lessons for the following day.

"Kitty," she said, when that erratic young person had jumped up to lean her body half out of the window for the twentieth time, "if you cannot sit still yourself, you ought to have some thought for me. What am I to do if you keep rushing to the window and back again to your seat every couple of minutes?"

"I am looking for Elma," said Kitty.

"For Elma Lewis? Do you expect her to-night?"

"Yes, and on a matter of vital importance. Oh, don't talk to me please, Alice. If she doesn't come soon, I believe my heart will burst."

"That is exactly like one of your exaggerated statements," said Alice. "People's hearts don't burst. Oh, if you only would stay quiet."

"I believe that's herself turning round the corner," cried Kitty, bending out so far now that it was a wonder she was not overbalanced.

"Really, Kitty, you make my heart stand still," said Alice. "You will fall out if you are not careful. Oh, for goodness' sake, don't stoop out any further."

"It's not her," said Kitty, popping in her head. "I was only stooping far enough to catch a glimpse of her boots. Elma always wears such horrid shabby boots; and her feet are too large. By the way, Alice, what do you think of these shoes; do you like them with straps across, and little rosettes?"

"I don't like anything in the way of dress at the present moment," said Alice. "I want quiet and peace. It is impossible for to do anything while you fidget as you do."

Kitty jumped with a bang into the nearest chair; opened a novel, and tried to read it upside down.

"If she isn't in time I won't be able to send the letter to-night and then—Alice, do you mind my interrupting you for a moment? What time does the last post go?"

"The pillar outside the gate is cleared at twelve," said Alice.

"It is only nine now. You don't happen to be able to tell me when a letter, cleared at twelve, would reach Castle Malone?"

"I cannot tell you. Forgive me, Kitty, I cannot stay in the room any longer. I am going to our bedroom."

Alice gathered up her books, and swept out of the room. When she reached the bedroom she shut and locked the door.

Kitty was now left alone in the drawing-room, for Mr. and Mrs. Denvers were spending the evening out. She was glad of this, as she could lean as far out of the window as she dared, and there was no one to shout at her. She could also pace up and down the room, which she presently did with the rapidity and eagerness of a young tigress.

Oh, to be back again at Castle Malone! What was Laurie doing now? Suppose Paddy Wheel-about really told her father about Laurie!

Squire Malone was extremely kind to Kitty; there was no saying what he would not do for Kitty were she in trouble; but Laurie and Pat were different matters. He had fits of severity with them—only fits, mind you; for he was too Irish in his character, too generous-hearted, ever to keep his anger long; but in these fits he often made strange resolves, and when these resolves were made, as a rule, he carried them out. He was too proud to change his mind. If once he decided that the boys were to go to school to England, to school they must go—to "prison," Kitty termed it. Tears rose in her bright eyes, they rolled down her cheeks. Oh, why was not Elma in time? How dreadful, how dreadful if she (Kitty) missed the twelve-o'clock post! She was in this state of fret and worry, when Fred entered the room. Fred

hated all girls, with the exception of Kitty Malone. He could not be said by this time to hate her, for he admired her very much indeed. The moment she saw him she called out to him to come in.

"Ah, then, Fred, it is you. Come along in," she cried; "you'll be a drain of a comfort—not much, but still a drain. Oh, Fred, it's I who am in the trouble entirely. You wouldn't think it to look at me, but I am."

"Dear me, Kitty, I am sorry," said Fred. "What's up? Has Alice been teasing you as usual?"

"Oh, bother Alice! as if I minded her little pin-pricks. It's that darling Laurie in Ireland. He has got into trouble, the broth of a boy that he is."

She then related what had occurred in connection with Paddy Wheel-about's coat.

"And the poor old coat is in the bottom of the lake," she added, "and the lake is feet deep in mud just at the bottom, and anything that falls with a weight into it would sink and sink. Oh, they will never find the coat till the day of judgment, and it full of beautiful money! And Paddy Wheel-about has lost the little grain of sense he ever possessed, and Laurie will be sent to one of those prisons."

"To prison?" cried Fred; "but surely your father——"

"Oh, I mean a school—it's all the same. Don't interrupt me, Fred. When my mind is full I must rattle off the speech somehow."

"And he wants you to send him ten pounds?"

"Yes."

"And have you got ten pounds to send him?"

"To be sure I have—I have ten pounds ten. I am an awful girl for spending money. I bought a whole pound's worth of chocolate yesterday. I ony wish I had the money now instead; but poor little Agnes Moore and the other girls in my class, they do love chocolates, and they quite seem to fatten them. I bought the chocolates, and I have got ten shillings in my pocket."

"But you showed me a whole purseful of gold the other day," said Fred.

"Well, it's gone, Fred, and it isn't gone; but I know who could help me to find it if I could catch a sight of her."

"And who is that?" asked Fred.

"Elma Lewis."

"Elma Lewis! Do you like her?"

"I can't say that I like her—no I don't think I do; but she would help me, if I could only get to see her."

"Then, do you want me to go to her house and tell her so?"

"Why, Fred, that's a splendid idea. You are a jewel, a darling, a duck! Let me fetch my hat, and you and I will go together."

"But I don't know my lessons yet. It is that beastly German. I have pages to translate. It is such rot."

"Oh, what does the German matter? Think of the misery

poor Laurie is in. Just stay where you are, Fred; I'll be back in a minute."

Kitty dashed upstairs, two or three steps at a time, and thundered a loud tattoo on the locked door of Alice's bedroom.

"You cannot come in, whoever you are," cried Alice from within.

"Yes, but I must, Alice, aroon; let me in, jewel that you are. I want my hat, and gloves and jacket, nothing else. Do, for goodness' sake, let me in, Alice, asthore!"

But Alice was obdurate. Once let Kitty in, she would never be able to get rid of her again, and her lessons must be learned. They were specially difficult and required all her attention.

"Then if you won't," cried Kitty, whose quick temper was beginning to rise, "at least fling the things out of the window."

"You know you must not go out at this hour."

"If you won't give them to me," said Kitty, "I'll go without them."

"You are not to have them; you are not to go out. It isn't right," called Alice, who felt strong in the cause of virtue.

Kitty rattled violently on the handle for a moment longer, and then rushed downstairs again to where Fred was waiting.

"I can't get my hat," she said; "but it doesn't matter. I'll go as I am."

Now Kitty's dress was more picturesque than suitable. She had on a crimson blouse and a skirt bedizened with many ribbons and frills. The blouse had only elbow sleeves and was cut rather low in the neck. Nothing could be more becoming to the dancing eyes, the rose-bloom cheeks, the head of dark hair.

"Lend me a cap of yours, Fred, there's a darling," called Kitty, "and we'll be off. Alice is in one of her tantrums, and she won't let me into our room nor give me my hat and jacket. If your mother were there it would be all right."

Fred only thought that Kitty looked remarkably pretty. It did not occur to him as at all queer that she should want to walk a couple of miles in this erratic dress. He went downstairs, accommodated her with a small cap which bore the college coat of arms in front, and the two were soon hurrying along the roads at a rapid in the direction of Elma's house.

There were two ways to Elma's home. One way was by crossing a wide common, cutting off a certain corner, walking down a by-street, and so, by a series of short cuts, reaching Constantine Road. By the other and slightly longer way you had to pass an open thoroughfare in the center of which blazed, with its shining lights and its gay exterior, a large public-house called the "Spotted Leopard." Now the "Spotted Leopard" was by no means a nice place to pass at night. Men considerably the worse for drink were apt to linger about the doors. Gossiping and idle fellows would congregate just

by this special corner, ready to take up any bit of fun or nonsense which might be coming, meaning no special mischief, but being decidedly disagreeable to meet at night.

Fred was as careless a schoolboy as could be found in the length and breadth of Great Britain; Kitty was equally reckless, perhaps more so, if that were possible. That special evening Fred decided that they would not take the short cut across the common.

"A beastly lonely place at this hour of the night," he said, "and the road is so uneven and there are no lamps. We'll go round by the 'Spotted Leopard.' You don't mind, do you Kit?"

"Never a bit," answered Kitty. "Come along, Fred; stretch your legs. I must get to see Elma Lewis to-night as quickly as possible."

Fred walked fast, and Kitty laughed and talked and danced by his side. Now that she was in action she forgot her fears; her volatile spirits rose once again to a height. She entertained Fred with numerous stories relating to Paddy Wheelabout, Laurie, and Pat, and invited him to come to Castle Malone for the whole of the summer holidays, assuring him that the fishing would be splendid, the cycling superb, the riding such as would make your eyes water, and the shooting and the hunting when that season began all that could stimulate the least ambitious of boys. And when Kitty spoke she was apt to illustrate her words, dancing now in front of her companion, now keeping by his side, now lingering a little behind him, all the time gesticulating with eyes and lips and gay motions. She was like a restive young colt—beautiful, excitable. The boy felt that he had never had such a charming companion before.

All went well, and Kitty's bizarre dress, her hair tossed wildly over her head and hanging partly down her shoulders, her little feet encased in the shoes with the rosettes and steel buckles, the frills on her gay skirt, her bare arms failed to attract any special attention. But when they got into the neighborhood of the "Spotted Leopard," a blaze of light fell full across her. She was a remarkable enough figure to be out at this hour, and when joined to the somewhat peculiar spectacle, the wild-looking boys—for they were little more—who had congregated round this special corner, saw the college cap on her head, they made a rush forward and the next moment had surrounded her.

They began to laugh and to make facetious remarks. It was all done in a second. Kitty stood stock still as if some one had shot her. Her gay manner ceased on the instant, she drew herself erect, and the next moment aimed a blow straight from the shoulder at the nearest of the men, knocking him over as completely as though he had been a ninepin; then taking hold of Fred's arm—who had come to her rescue, although the poor lad had not the least idea what to do—marched away, her face as crimson as her gay silk blouse.

"Well, Kitty, you did that splendidly," he said.

"The impertinent wretches! Don't speak to me about them," answered Kitty. But just then she came face to face with a more serious obstacle. This was no less a person than Miss Worrick herself.

Now if there was a prim mistress in the whole length and breadth of England, it was Matilda Worrick. She liked girls to be neatly dressed; she could not bear to see them out at what she called inclement hours. She would have thought it the height of impropriety for Kitty and Fred to walk together at such an hour; but when in addition to this Kitty went out in a dress which Miss Worrick would have thought very unsuitable for home, when she wore a boy's college cap on her head, and when she had so far distinguished herself as to have been for a moment the center of a lot of low, noisy, rough men, Miss Worrick felt that the moment had come for her to interfere. She grasped Kitty Malone firmly by the arm.

"What are you doing, Miss Malone?" she said. "How dare you be out at this hour?"

"How dare you interfere?" answered Kitty, who, excited already, could not for a moment brook Miss Worrick's interference.

"I shall march you straight home," said the mistress. "If Miss Sherrard knew of this she would expel you from the school. You are a very wicked girl. Fred Denvers, you can go home or go on with your walk, just as you like, but I have charge of Miss Malone; she belongs to the Middleton School, and I must see her home before I go a step further."

Poor Kitty felt staggered.

"I really meant no harm," she said. "I cannot imagine what you are talking about. I could not get my hat and jacket, and as it was most important that I should see Elma Lewis, Fred promised to take me to her house. Please don't ask me to return now with you, Miss Worrick, I really cannot come."

But Miss Worrick was inexorable. She grasped Kitty very firmly by the arm, turned abruptly in the direction of home, and walked forward with a firm step. There was no help for it; Kitty Malone must accompany her. They soon found themselves back again at the Denvers' house. Mr. and Mrs. Denvers were out, but Miss Worrick inquired for Alice.

"Ask Miss Alice to come to me immediately," she said to the servant.

The girl looked pityingly at Kitty, who was a prime favorite with her, and then went away to fulfill her errand.

The instant Alice got this somewhat startling message, she forgot her lesson, unlocked her bedroom door, and flew downstairs as fast as she could. Miss Worrick was standing in the center of the drawing-room. Kitty was leaning up against one of the window-curtains. Kitty's face was red,

her hair was tossed in wild confusion, and her dark eyes seemed to flash fire.

"Alice," said Miss Worrick, coming straight up to Alice when she appeared. "I must ask you to take charge of Kitty Malone."

"Why so?" asked Alice in some astonishment.

"Just do what I say. Your father and mother are out. Kitty is not to return to school to-morrow until she hears from Miss Sherrard. In the absence of your parents I put her in your charge, Alice. She has behaved disgracefully, and I shall have the great pain of reporting what I have just witnessed to our head-mistress to-morrow."

So saying, Miss Worrick walked quickly out of the room and out of the house.

"Well, thank goodness, she's gone—the old cat!" cried Kitty.

"Now, Kitty, what have you done?" said Alice. "Oh, this is terrible! Fresh scrapes! We seem to live in constant hot water. What is the matter now, you headstrong and dreadful girl?"

"Nothing is the matter," replied Kitty, "absolutely nothing. It is all a storm in a teacup. But if any one is to blame you are the one."

"I?" cried Alice. "What next?"

"Well, you are. You would not give me my hat and jacket. I have a nice plain hat and jacket to match. I should have put them on if you had not locked our bedroom door, and prevented my coming into the room, which is just as much mine as yours. As it was imperative for me to see Elma Lewis immediately, I asked Fred if he would walk round with me to her house, and I wore his college cap. When we were passing the 'Spotted Leopard' a lot of rough, rude boys rushed out and began to make impertinent remarks about my dress. I just gave one of them a black eye and knocked him over. The next moment I found myself under the fire of Miss Worrick's anger."

"And small wonder," said Alice. "Kitty, what is to be done? Before you came here I thought myself a respectable girl—all we Middleton girls did; and now for such a fearful thing to happen. Why, it will be all over the place in the morning. They will talk of it everywhere. Oh, Kitty, you have disgraced me forever."

Here Alice burst into tears.

"Good gracious!" cried Kitty, "what are you crying about? I did nothing; it was the rude men, or boys, or whatever you like to call them, who were to blame."

"You did nothing, going out in that dress?" cried Alice—"that red blouse, and your arms bare, and with Fred's college cap on your head. I should not be a bit surprised if Fred were expelled; he will certainly get into an awful scrape. Oh dear! Oh dear!"

"I cannot imagine what you are talking and crying about,"

said Kitty. "But there; I have got a headache, and am going to bed. I suppose there is no chance of my— Oh, poor Laurie! What a wicked girl Elma Lewis is!"

Kitty rushed up to her room. Not that she was frightened—that was not her way; but she saw that disagreeable things might be pending. In the meantime her most anxious thoughts were for Laurie. What would happen if she could not send him the money by an early post?

CHAPTER XIII.

COVENTRY.

EARLY the next morning Mrs. Denvers was a good deal surprised by receiving a letter from Miss Sherrard. It ran as follows:

"DEAR MRS. DENVERS: I have just heard an extraordinary story from Miss Worrick with regard to Kitty Malone. She met Kitty with your Fred at a late hour last night just outside the 'Spotted Leopard.' She was not wearing an outdoor jacket, and had the college cap on her head. In consequence, she was spoken to impertinently by some men outside the public-house, and when Miss Worrick came up had just knocked one of them down. Miss Worrick says, further, that Kitty showed her great impertinence; and, in short, that the whole affair was wrong and disgraceful. It is my painful duty to look thoroughly into this matter, and I should be glad if you would bring Miss Malone to Middleton School this morning in order that I may do so.

"Yours very truly,
"EMMA SHERRARD."

"My dear Alice," said Mrs. Denvers, as her daughter entered the room, "what does this letter mean?"

Alice read Miss Sherrard's letter hastily.

"It is exactly as I feared, mother," she said.

"Exactly as you feared, Alice! What do you mean?"

"I always told you that Kitty would be certain to get into trouble sooner or later. Well, she got into trouble last night."

"But what occurred?"

"What occurred!" said Fred, who came into the room at that moment. "I thought you would be talking about poor Kitty. I will tell you exactly what did occur, mother; but first I want to say something else. Kitty is just as nice a girl as we ever had in the house. She has not a low nor a small thought in her, but she is excitable, and she has high spirits; and yesterday evening, when I went into the drawing-room, I found her there alone, and in no end of a fret because one of her brothers in Ireland had got into trouble. He had written to her; but she would not tell me what he said. For

some extraordinary reason, which none of us know, it seems that Elma Lewis can get him out of his trouble. I cannot pretend to explain what this means; but such is the fact. Poor Kitty was wild to see Elma, and she asked me if I would walk over to her house with her. Of course I promised to do so, for it was difficult not to be good-natured to the poor thing."

"At what hour was this, Fred?" interrupted Mrs. Denvers.

"It was rather late, I will own, mother—about half-past nine."

"Go on, my dear boy. What happened then?"

"Now it is Alice's turn to get into your black books," continued Fred, darting a malicious look at his sister. "She doesn't like Kitty, and nothing that Kitty can do or say is right in Alice's eyes."

"Fred!" interrupted Alice—"Mother, you have no right to listen to him."

"I am bound to hear both sides of this story, Alice," said Mrs. Denvers. "Fred shall tell his side first. Go on, my boy."

"When I arranged to go with Kitty, she ran upstairs to the bedroom which she shares with Alice, to get her jacket and hat; but Alice had locked the door and wouldn't let her in. I heard her crying out and begging of Alice to do so, or, at least, if she would not, to throw her hat and jacket out of the window; but no! good nature was not to be expected from my amiable sister. So then Kitty ran down again, and said that as the night was warm it really didn't matter a bit; and she asked me to lend her a cap. I took one from the peg in the hall, never seeing that it was one of the college caps with the coat-of-arms in front, and Kitty popped it on, and off we set. We neither of us gave a thought to her dress, and we walked as fast as possible, chatting and laughing all the way. All went well till we got in front of that horrid 'Spotted Leopard,' and there were several lads round the door. I suppose Kitty's dress attracted them as well as her pretty face, and all in a minute they surrounded her. Such awful cheek! But do you think Kitty would put up with their impudence? I never saw a girl like her! She just aimed a blow straight at one of the fellows and knocked him over as if he were a nine-pin. I can tell you she had the laugh on her side; and I don't believe we would have heard anything more about it if that mean, spiteful old cat, Miss Worrick, hadn't been coming round the corner. She ran up to Kitty, and took possession of her, and marched her off home, and put her, forsooth, into Alice's custody. That's the explanation of Miss Sherrard's letter, mother."

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Denvers, "it was a most imprudent thing to do. But of course, the poor child meant no harm."

"I should rather think she didn't," cried Fred. "The one you ought really to blame is Alice. No one would have looked at Kitty, nor thought of her one way or the other, if

Alice had let her get her hat and jacket; but what was she to do when she was locked out of her own bedroom?"

"But she knew very well that she was breaking rules," said Mrs. Denvers. "None of the Middleton girls are allowed to go out so late in the evening except with a suitable escort; and she certainly ought not to have gone in the dress you have described, my boy. It was all thoughtlessness; but she will get into sad trouble, I fear."

"Of course it was thoughtlessness," said Fred; "and the poor thing was bothered, dreadfully bothered, about that brother in Ireland."

"I see, mother," said Alice, "that you are determined to take Kitty's part, whatever happens. She has bewitched you, like all the rest of the household."

"Whom have I bewitched now?" asked Kitty, who entered the room just then.

"Oh, my poor, dear child," said Mrs. Denvers, "you have got into a terrible scrape. See this letter which I have just received from your head-mistress."

Kitty eagerly seized the letter. She was looking pale, and not like her usual self. There were heavy black lines under her eyes. The poor girl had spent most of her night crying. The thought of Laurie was resting on her soul; she was very anxious about him, and, in consequence, very miserable.

"I always said that I hated England," she cried, coloring as she spoke. "Oh, I know, dear Mrs. Denvers, that you are a jewel; and as to Fred, he is no end of a darling; and Mr. Denvers is as nice as a man could be. But there's Alice, and she doesn't like me; and Miss Worrick can't bear me; and half the girls at school don't understand me, and, for the matter of that, I don't care for them; and I don't understand your stiff, proper English ways. I am far and away too wild for England. In Ireland we would only laugh at such a thing as happened last night. What does it matter what sort of a dress I go out in and at what hour I go, if I am doing right all the time? I wanted to do something for Laurie, for my dear, dear Laurie, who is in terrible trouble. Please, Mrs. Denvers, let me go home again. Let us both go to Miss Sherrard this morning, and tell her that it is all no use; Kitty Malone was born wild, and wild she will remain to the end of the chapter. Let me go home; please let me go home."

"My poor child, I must not yield to you," said Mrs. Denvers. "You have been sent to us to be made——"

"Oh, don't begin it," cried Kitty. "Don't begin to talk about all the things you have got to make me, and which, to be plain, none of you will ever succeed in doing, for I was not half nor a quarter as wild in Ireland. I was considered in some ways the steady one of the family; but here, why, I am provoked every minute of the day, and I—I can't stand it much longer."

"Well, sit down now and eat your breakfast," said Mrs.

Denvers, "for we must soon hurry off to school. Miss Sherrard will want to see us immediately after prayers."

Kitty seated herself, but she had little appetite for her food.

"Why don't you eat?" said Fred, who sat next to her. "Let me help you to some of this porridge; it's jolly well done this morning, and you always like it, don't you?"

"Yes, yes; but I have got a lump in my throat and I can't swallow,' answered Kitty. "Thank you all the same, Fred. There are some chocolates in my room if you like to steal up in the middle of the day in case I am locked up, as twenty to one I shall be for this misdemeanor. There are some chocolates and some rock and toffee. You'll find them in my left-hand drawer in the corner. I spent a whole sovereign on sweets, as I told you a few days ago."

"Oh, thanks. Kitty, you are a brick," whispered Fred back in return.

"You can take as many as you like, Fred, old boy, for you are a comfort to me. I'll tell Laurie about you when I go back to Ireland."

"Come, come, my dears, no whispering," said Mrs. Denvers. "Kitty, if you don't care for your breakfast, perhaps you will go up to your room and make yourself tidy for school."

"Oh, am I not tidy now?" asked Kitty, jumping up and running to the glass in the overmantel to survey herself. "By the way, do you like my frock? it is quite new. Don't you think this crimson cotton with the white sash very effective? It is cool, and yet it's gay. I belong to the Tug—Oh! I must not mention that. I never did know such a place for awful secrets as England. I am drawn up every minute by remembering that I must not mention something. But how do you like my dress, Mrs. Denvers?"

"Well, dear, I prefer quieter colors; but we will say nothing more about it just now. Get your hat, Kitty; put on your outdoor shoes and your gloves, and come down immediately, for it is time for us to start."

As soon as Kitty had left the room, Alice turned to her mother.

"Are you going to encourage her in all her follies?" she asked.

"My dear Alice, I don't encourage her in her follies; but there is no use in pulling the poor child up short every moment. She expresses herself quite correctly when she says that she is wild; she is not broken in. But to break in Kitty Malone too thoroughly might also break her heart, and that would never do."

"Break her heart! I don't believe she has got one," said Alice. "But, there, I can't talk any longer on the subject."

It occurred to her that if she started immediately for school she might call for Bessie Challoner, and tell her what had occurred. Bessie's sympathy would be very sweet, and Alice determined to secure it if possible. Accordingly she left the house, and at about a quarter to nine found herself

at Bessie's house. Bessie was standing on the steps drawing on her gloves.

"Why, Alice, what has brought you?" she cried; "and where is Kitty?"

"Oh, don't mention Kitty, if you don't want to rile me beyond endurance," said Alice.

"I always do rile you when I mention her," answered Bessie; "but where is she all the same?"

"With mother—she is coming to school with mother."

"With your mother—to Middleton School! What do you mean?"

"Only that mother has to bring her. She has got into no end of a row."

"Has she? Oh, I am sorry," said Bessie.

"Come out, Bessie," said Alice. "It is a little early to get to school, but we may as well walk slowly, and I will tell you all about it as we go along."

This Alice did, enlarging much upon Kitty's dress, her crimson blouse, her bare arms, the college cap on her head, and her little shoes with the buckles and rosettes.

"She must have looked very pretty," said Bessie.

"Bessie! you really are enough to distract any one. Don't you see the impropriety of it? Don't you see that this will get all over the place? People will say that a Middleton girl dressed so unsuitably, so loudly, that— Oh, don't you see it?"

"I don't see anything in it except a silly, foolish, girlish act, uncommonly like Kitty Malone," said Bessie. "You are determined to make mountains out of molehills, Alice."

"No, I am not," said Alice. "Anyhow," she added in a tone of triumph, "Miss Sherrard thinks it disgraceful, and so does Miss Worrick. I suppose you will not go against the opinions of your own mistresses, will you, Bessie?"

"No, no; only I am sorry," said Bessie.

At that moment the two girls reached the school. Gwin Harley was just driving up in her pony-chaise, and Elma, as usual, was hovering near.

"Come here, Elma," said Bessie. "We have something to tell you."

"What is it?" asked Elma eagerly.

"It is this," cried Alice. "Kitty Malone has got into the most awful scrape. She went out last night with Fred, in her red blouse—you know that silk blouse she is so fond of wearing?"

"I know; it is sweetly pretty," said Elma.

"Oh, there you are, praising everything she does! Well, anyhow, she wore it, and her arms were bare to the elbow, and she stuck one of the college caps on her head. What will Dr. Butler say? She went with Fred to see you, by the way, Elma. She seemed in an awful hurry to find you. She was in trouble about her brother, and she said you could help her."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Elma. But she had an uncomfort-

able feeling as the words were said. Her thoughts naturally flew to the eight pounds which Kitty had lent her. Was it possible that Kitty wanted that lovely, that beautiful money back again? Elma had felt almost as if she were living in fairyland from the time that money had been in her possession. She would part with it whenever the day came, with extreme reluctance.

"Well," she said, "I cannot imagine what she wanted with me; but what happened?"

"Some rough boys outside the 'Spotted Leopard' were rude to her, and she knocked one of them down; then Miss Worrick came up and took her back to our house; and Miss Sherrard has written this morning to say that mother is to bring Kitty up to school, and that she must have the whole thing explained. There's a nice state of things!"

At that moment the great gong was heard, and the girls were obliged to troop into the school. Prayers were conducted as usual in the great hall, and Elma, Gwin, Alice, and Bessie looked in every imaginable corner for a sight of Kitty Malone. She was not present, however, and they were obliged afterward to go to their class-rooms without having caught sight of her beaming and brilliant face.

Meanwhile Mrs. Denvers and Kitty were waiting for Miss Sherrard in the head-mistress' private sitting-room. Kitty went to the window and looked out.

"I like Miss Sherrard," she said, turning to Mrs. Denvers as she spoke. "I am really sorry to annoy her. It is about a fortnight ago since she spoke to me in this very room; she spoke so kindly, and told me that I had got talents. I was astonished, for I thought she meant cleverness, and I have always been told that I am a dunce; she said that she knew I had good abilities, and that besides I had plenty of other talents—nice dress, and good looks." Kitty colored and flashed a half-defiant, half-roguish glance at Mrs. Denvers. "She also spoke about my money as a talent. Oh, dear, I felt half-conceited, half-delighted when I left her, and I made up my mind that I would be good; but it seems useless, more than useless. Oh, my poor money, my poor money! I have got none of it left now, or at least scarcely any."

"My dear child, no money!" exclaimed Mrs. Denvers. "Impossible. When you spoke to me last you had about fifteen pounds. Kitty, my dear, it is wrong for you to squander money in that fashion."

"But I haven't squandered it, Mrs. Denvers, not really. I have not got it with me, it is true; but most of it is safe, only I must not talk about that. There's another secret for you. What an awful place England is! Oh, dear, dear! I am in a muddle about everything. I can't bear to stand in this room and remember Miss Sherrard's talk. Fancy her saying that even my dress was a talent! Now there's something in favor of my nice red cotton and my dear red silk blouse; and fancy her saying still more that my looks, my pretty face,

was a talent! Mrs. Denvers, do you think me pretty, very, very, very pretty?"

"No, Kitty dear, not so wonderfully pretty as that; but you have an attractive face. Miss Sherrard is quite right; beauty is a gift, although it used to be my old-fashioned idea that the less girls were told about their looks the better."

"Oh, but that's all exploded, love," cried Kitty. "In these days girls are told when they are pretty just as much as they are told when they are clever. Now, I'm not clever, not a bit. I'm a dunce, an out and out dunce; but at any rate I've got a pretty face, and I promised that I would use my talents for—for the best—" Here she lowered her face and a thoughtful and beautiful expression came into the great big eyes. "But it's no use," she added. "I am bothered entirely every day of my life, and I am just going from bad to worse."

"Hush, Kitty, you must not talk in that way. Hark! I think I hear Miss Sherrard's step." As Mrs. Denvers spoke the door was slowly opened and Miss Sherrard, accompanied by Miss Worrick, came in. Miss Sherrard was just about to speak; but before she could utter a word Kitty rushed to her.

"I have failed, darling; I have failed entirely," she gasped out, "I meant to do right, but I did wrong; I have become worse and worse, although I cannot see the wrong myself. But Miss Worrick has found it out. I want to give up the school, darling, and to go back to Old Ireland. They don't think so badly of me in Old Ireland and they'll let me dress as I like and go out when I like; and—and, I am not fit for England, dear. Please write to dad and tell him so—tell him I am a failure as far as England is concerned. He'll understand, dear old man. He'll be sorry, but he'll understand. Let me go home again, please, Miss Sherrard—let me go home!"

"No, Kitty, I shall do nothing of the kind," answered Miss Sherrard. "You must not kiss me just now, my dear; no, I am not pleased at all. You did very wrong to go out as late as you did last night. You broke one of the strictest rules of the school, and have brought discredit upon us all. Miss Worrick, will you please relate exactly what occurred?"

Miss Worrick now stood up and made as much as she possibly could of poor Kitty's little escapade in front of the "Spotted Leopard." The story so decribed made anything but a pleasant picture. Miss Sherrard, who was tenacious with regard to the school, and most anxious that each and all of her girls should bear the highest character for quiet and orderly behavior, was deeply annoyed.

"Kitty," she said, "I have always been strangely unwilling to punish you. I have never ceased to remember that you have not been brought up like most of the girls here—that you have enjoyed a freer, wilder life. On that account, I have tried to be very patient with you, my dear; but I am sorry to say that I have no alternative now. I must punish

you, and severely. For the next week you are to stay in during the morning recess, and after school is over will remain here day by day to learn different tasks which will be set you. Further, my dear—and this, I am sure, will be the most severe part of your punishment—your school companions are absolutely forbidden to speak to you, and you must give your word of honor that you will hold no communication with any of them until the week has expired."

This very severe sentence made poor Kitty quite collapse. She sat down on the nearest chair and her rosy face turned pale.

"Oh, I cannot give my word of honor," she gasped. "I must speak quick. I must at least speak to Elma Lewis."

"You are not to speak to any of your companions with the exception of Alice Denvers, in whose house you live," said Miss Sherrard. "Kitty, if you disobey me, I shall have to expel you, and then indeed you will be disgraced for life. My dear, you must bow to my authority—you are to speak to no girl in the school. I trust to your honor to obey me in this particular. If you are expelled—and it will certainly happen if I find that you are not keeping your word—you will be branded for life."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LOST PACKET.

After parting with Kitty, Miss Sherrard went back to the school. As she did so, she said a few words to Miss Worrick. The result of this was that all the girls were summoned to appear in the great central hall. When there they were told very briefly—Miss Sherrard standing by her desk as she spoke—that Miss Malone was in disgrace.

"Miss Malone has done something which obliges me to put her into Coventry for a week," said the head-mistress. "Her school-fellows are forbidden to have any intercourse with her. If she attempts to speak to any girl belonging to Middleton School, with the exception of Alice Denvers, in whose house she is living, that girl holds communication with her at her own peril. Such a girl stands a grave chance of being expelled from the school."

Miss Sherrard then descended from her platform, and the usual work of the morning went on.

It may easily be guessed that Kitty Malone, and Kitty Malone only, was the subject of conversation during recess. What had she done? Why was Miss Sherrard so very severe on her? It was not often that a Middleton girl was given such a very terrible punishment. Alice who knew all about it, and Bessie, who knew a little, were therefore in immense request. Girls came up to these two in groups to find out what was the matter; and when they heard from Alice the very glaring account of what Kitty had really done on the previous night, they listened with open mouths, giving vent

to their feelings in different ways. The larger number pronounced Kitty's conduct to be the height of all that was disgraceful.

"Is it true," said one, "that she really wore the college cap? Oh, what will Dr. Butler say if he finds it out? Alice, you cannot mean that she had bare arms, bare from the elbows? Oh, impossible!"

"But Alice," said another, "tell me, did she really, really, knock one of those horrid boys down?"

"Yes; like a ninepin, so Fred says," replied Alice. "Oh, it was disgraceful. Don't talk of it any more; my cheeks burn whenever I think of it."

"But after all, Alice"—said Gwin, who came up at that moment. Gwin's tone sounded quiet, stately, penetrating; it rose above the din which the other girls were making. "After all, Alice, don't you think that you were to blame too? Why did you not let Kitty get into your room and hers? If she wanted to go for a walk it was surely natural enough to ask for her hat and jacket; you refused to give them to her."

"Of course I refused," said Alice, who did not at all wish to share any of poor Kitty's blame. "Kitty knew perfectly well that she was breaking one of the school rules as well as one of our home rules by going out at such an hour—it was between nine and ten o'clock. As to her going without her hat and jacket, such an idea never entered my wildest dreams. No; bad as I thought Kitty, I did not think her bad enough for that. There is no excuse for her. She is well punished, and for my part I cannot but rejoice."

"For my part," said Gwin gravely, "I am extremely sorry. I like Kitty. I like her much. She has her faults of course; she is different from any of the rest of us; she is wild and daring and eccentric; but she is also the soul of honesty and and candor. She is very affectionate and very generous. She has not been brought up in the least as we have been. Things we think wrong are not considered wrong by Kitty Malone. As she herself expresses it, she is a little bit wild. Oh, I am sorry for her, dreadfully sorry; and I think Miss Sherrard has been too severe. I wonder at Miss Sherrard. I thought she understood Kitty. She spoke to mother so kindly about her yesterday; she said there was a great deal of good in the Irish girl, as she called her; and also said that she was very glad that I was her friend. Although Miss Sherrard does not know any of the rules of the Tug-of-war Society, she naturally knows that we have formed it. She told me that she could not express how pleased she was at our having asked Kitty to become a member. Girls, I wish I could speak to Miss Sherrard. I think I will. It will break Kitty's heart to be kept in Coventry for a week."

"I doubt if she has a heart," said Alice. "It is all very fine to talk of her affectionate ways; for my part I call them nothing but impetuous. She is vain, conceited and selfish;

and provided she gets her own way does not care what prejudices she rides rough-shod over. Oh, I have no patience with her."

"But," said Bessie Challoner, who was standing stolidly by, looking very determined and very quiet, "what did Kitty want out at that hour? Kitty, with all her faults, would not break the rules unless she had a strong motive. What could have been the matter?"

"And why did she want to see you, Elma?" said Gwin. "Can you throw any light on the subject?"

Elma colored first and then turned pale. Several pairs of eyes were immediately fixed on her; one girl looked at the other, and a few nodded significantly. Elma observed the looks and turned away in hot fear.

"I don't know what she wanted with me," she muttered.

The rest of the school hours passed as usual, and just before dinner, when the great school broke up for the day, Kitty was still the object for conversation. Gwin lingered a little behind the others, and Bessie stopped to ask why she was doing so.

"I have almost made up my mind," she said, "to plead with Miss Sherrard for Kitty."

"Oh, Gwin; how noble of you. I respect you, I do from my heart; but I tell you what. Would it not be better for us to do something of this sort? Why should not all the Tug-of-war girls plead for her? That would seem more effective and stronger, would it not? Suppose we wrote a letter, a sort of round-robin, and sent it to Miss Sherrard, begging of her to forgive Kitty this time; and taking upon ourselves the responsibility of her future conduct. Oh, I say, Gwin, could we not do it?"

"It is a splendid thought," said Gwin; "much—much better than my talking to Miss Sherrard alone. Look here, Bessie; could we not manage to have meeting of the Tug-of-war at my house this evening? Oh, there's Elma; I'll ask her at once. Elma, come here."

Elma who was just shouldering her books preparatory to leaving the school, turned when she heard Gwin's voice.

"What is it, Gwin?" she asked; her manner was a little nervous.

Gwin hastily repeated Bessie's daring suggestion.

"Oh, I'll come of course," said Elma; but there was a certain amount of apathy in her tone.

"And I will secure Alice; I am getting quite to dislike Alice, though," said Bessie.

Gwin promised to write to the other girls at once, and it was finally arranged that a meeting should be held at Harley Grove that evening between four and five o'clock.

Elma walked home alone, musing much over the aspect of affairs.

"I wonder what Kitty did want with me," she said to herself. "Doubtless it had something to do with that money.

Kitty was in despair, so it seems. Oh, there's Fred Denvers; perhaps he can tell me something? Hullo, Fred!"

Elma stopped; Fred was on his way from college; he was whistling a gay air, and did not see Elma until he had almost reached her side.

"Hullo, Elma," he answered; "how are you?"

"Oh, I am very well, Fred, thank you; but have you heard about Kitty Malone?"

"How everybody does cry out Kitty Malone; it will soon be sung by the birds in the air," said Fred; "Kitty Malone! Kitty Malone! What's the matter with her now?"

"Oh, she has got into the most awful scrape; of course you know what occurred last night?"

"Rather!" said Fred. "I was with her. I say, Elma, she is about the pluckiest girl I ever met. Didn't she hit out straight from the shoulder; and didn't that fellow go down like a ninepin! I don't believe he is able to see out of his eye to-day. Why, that little hand of hers is as hard as iron. Who taught her the art of boxing like that? She's a born fencer! She's a splendid girl. I never met any one like her."

Elma did not feel so much annoyed at this praise of Kitty as Alice would have been; but all the same it was scarcely gratifying to her. After reflecting for a moment, during which Fred was preparing to continue his swinging pace toward his home, she said suddenly: "But where was she going, Fred?"

Fred's big blue eyes lit up with a sudden light of intelligence.

"What a fool I am!" he said. "You perhaps can throw light on this mystery. She wanted to see you, Elma. I cannot imagine what about. You know how fond she is of her brother Laurie? Well, it seems that Laurie got into some sort of scrape; and Kitty, poor girl, she was in a way about it; fretting like anything, and she said no one could help her but you. Can you tell me what she wanted with you? She was in a rare hurry to get to your house."

"Of course I cannot tell," answered Elma. "Who could be responsible for the vagaries of Kitty Malone? I thought I would ask you. I thought perhaps you would know. Of course they are talking about it at school, and they are wondering what I can have to do with it. It is anything but pleasant for me I can tell you."

"Oh, you'll manage well enough; you'll fight your own battles. Well, what have they done with her at the school? You look quite mysterious."

"I forgot I had never mentioned it to you. They have sent her to Coventry; Miss Sherrard has done it. We are none of us to speak to her for a week."

"Whew!" said Fred, rounding his lips for a prolonged whistle. "Well, that won't bother Kitty much; I don't suppose talking to you would be much of a loss to her."

"But you don't understand, Fred. It's the disgrace, and Gwin Harley thinks it will break her heart; and— But I must not tell you any more; I must hurry home."

"Poor Kitty! Anyhow, there's no embargo put on my talking to her," said Fred to himself. "Poor old Kit, poor old girl; I'll make it up to her if I can."

Fred ran home as fast as he could, and Elma continued her way.

"There's no doubt of it," she said to herself; "she wants that money. She will manage, Coventry or not, to ask for it. She promised me faithfully that she would never tell that I borrowed it from her; but, being an Irish girl, she is scarcely likely to keep her word. Now that she is in trouble for some unknown cause, she is certain to blab it out. Did she not say herself that she could not keep a secret? Oh dear, what an awful mess I have got into. If it gets to be known that I borrowed eight pounds from Kitty I shall be expelled. If there is a rule that the Middleton governors are strict about, it is that by which the girls are forbidden to borrow money from one another; and eight pounds is such a large, large sum. All my future will be ruined if this is known. I had better give her back all the money that is left, and at once. It would be the safest plan. I can at any rate let her have seven sovereigns; and perhaps if she has that, she will not say anything whatever about the matter. How miserable I shall feel without it; but anything, anything is better than the dreadful fact getting to Miss Sherrard's ears that I broke one of the strictest rules of the school, and borrowed eight pounds from Kitty. The Tug-of-war Society would never again have anything to do with me. I should have the poorest chance of remaining in the school. It would get to Aunt Charlotte's ears. Yes, yes; all my future depends on keeping this thing dark. I must get rid of that dreadful money as quickly as possible. I thought my luck was going to turn; but it is far too good to be true that I might keep such a large sum of money safely. Poor Kitty! yes, of course, I'm sorry for her; but she is certain to tell on me. She would think nothing of getting me into the most terrible scrape. I —I am bound to think of myself first."

At this point in her meditations Elma reached the house in Constantine Road. She ran up the steps, let herself in with a latchkey, and went straight to her room. She opened the drawer where she kept Kitty's precious sovereigns and put in her hand to take out the little paper parcel. More than once since she had possessed this money had Elma examined that little packet, getting up early in the morning to gloat over it, looking at it the last thing at night; but always taking care that Carrie should be sound asleep. It gave her comfort, the comfort almost of a miser, to gaze at her gold. She used to forget at these supreme moments that the gold was in reality not hers at all. She used to forget everything but the delightful sense of possession. She felt as if she could never

spend the money, as if she must hoard it and hoard it just for the mere pleasure of looking at it. She knew the exact corner of the drawer where she kept it; no one ever dared to meddle with Elma's drawers. She kept the rest of the family more or less in awe of her. As to Maggie, she was honest as the day. But what was the matter? Search as she would she could not find the precious little packet. She looked frantically here, there, and everywhere. Soon she had removed the drawer from its case and had tumbled all the contents on her bed. Nowhere was the money to be found. Elma's face turned white as a sheet. She trembled from head to foot. In the midst of her meditations Carrie entered the room.

"My dear Elma, what is the matter?" she cried.

A glance had shown her what was really wrong. A smile crossed her face. She walked deliberately across the room and flung herself on her bed.

"How hot it is," she said with a pant.

"Dear me, Carrie, why are you so incorrigibly lazy?" said Elma. "Not that I care—I am in dreadful trouble, I——"

"You look like it," said Carrie. "What is the matter?"

"I am looking for some money."

"Money? What money are you likely to have?"

"Well, it so happens that I have some—a good deal. Carrie, have you seen it?"

"Have I seen what?" asked Carrie in a provokingly drawling voice.

"Why, my money. How did you think I got that dress, that dress which you are racking through at such a furious pace?"

Carrie was attired in the pale blue nun's veiling. It was Carrie's way to have a dress and to wear it morning, noon, and night, destroying all its freshness. The nun's veiling was already dirty and draggled-looking.

"How do you think I got that dress that you made such a fuss about if I had not money to pay for it?"

"I am sure I couldn't tell, and what's more, I didn't care," said Carrie. "What is vexing you now, Elma? Oh! what a commotion you are making in your poor drawer!"

"I have just lost seven sovereigns and—Carrie, I see by your face that you do know something about it. Is it possible that you stole the money?"

"How dare you accuse me of such a thing?" said Carrie, flaring up in apparently most righteous indignation—in reality she was enjoying herself immensely. She had made up her mind not to tell Elma the truth at present. By and by she would tell, after she had well frightened her sister, but certainly not yet.

"I know nothing whatever about it," she said, caring little for the lie which she was telling. "I am sorry you have lost it; but how did you get it?"

Elma was silent, shutting up her lips tightly. The dinner-

gong sounded, and the girls went down to their midday meal.

Carrie soon perceived that Elma was in real trouble. With all her low, idle, careless, and unprincipled ways, at the bottom of her heart she was fond of her sister. She made up her mind to visit Sam Raynes that evening and get him to return the money.

"Poor old Elma," she said to herself. "I don't want to be too hard on her. It is not the fun I expected when she looks at me with such miserable eyes. It would certainly not do for her to get talking to Maggie."

"You leave the matter to me. I may have a clue," she said, when dinner was over. "But rest assured on one point, Maggie has nothing to do with it, nor has mother."

Here Carrie ran upstairs, to put on her things preparatory to returning to her pupils.

Elma was now alone. The hour was three o'clock. At half-past four she was to meet Gwin Harley and the rest of the Tug-of-war girls. In the meantime she knew she could not possibly have any peace of mind until the seven sovereigns were discovered.

Mrs. Lewis had gone up as usual to her room to lie down. She had a headache and was in very low spirits. Elma glanced at her once or twice and determined not to worry her; but Maggie she considered her lawful prey. She had given Carrie no promise, and felt sure that Maggie and Carrie between them were at the bottom of the mystery. She determined to go into the kitchen and terrify Maggie into confession.

That young woman was busy giving sundry touches to the charming toque with which she intended to electrify her young man on the following Sunday.

"Maggie," said Elma, "I wish to speak to you."

"Oh lor! miss, how you startled me," cried Maggie. She jumped up as she spoke, dropping Kitty's violets to the floor. They were so natural, so beautiful, so exactly like the real flowers, that more than one girl had remarked upon them, and among these had been Elma. As they lay on the by-no-means-too-clean kitchen floor, she stooped now to pick them up.

"Where did you get these?" she asked in a sharp voice.

"Oh, Miss Helma, they're mine, and you have no right to 'em," was the quick reply.

"Where did you get them, Maggie? You're a bad girl; you must have stolen them."

"I steal 'em! I like that," said Maggie, turning first crimson and then very white. "They was give to me by the young Irish lady."

"By Miss Malone, Miss Kitty Malone?"

"Yes, miss; the prettiest young lady I ever clapped eyes on; she give 'em to me herself."

"Look here, Maggie," said Elma, "the violets don't matter.

Let us talk of something else. Do you know anything about some money which I keep in my drawer upstairs? Now look me straight in the eyes. I miss that money, and you know I can call in the police and have your boxes searched. Do you know anything about it? If you'll tell me the truth I'll be merciful to you. Last night I had seven sovereigns in my drawer, but now they are gone. Did you touch them, Maggie? Tell me the truth and at once."

"I touch your money, miss! I didn't know you had any, that I didn't."

Poor Maggie's face was a study. Perplexity, despair, indignation swept over it in a sort of terror.

"Miss Helma, you're cruel to talk to me like that," she cried. "Me touch your money! No, that I didn't. Oh, miss, is it the money Miss Malone come about? Is it gone?"

A wild hope flashed through Elma's brain, to be discarded the next moment. Could Kitty have come to the house and visited her room and taken away her own money herself?"

"What do you mean about Miss Malone?" she cried.

"She come here, miss. Oh, Miss Helma, don't look at me so scornfully. She came here yesterday and asked for you; and when I told her you was out she writ a letter, and said you was to have it the moment you come in, and that it was as important as the Bank of England. Yes, that she did—and she laid it on the blotter in the dining-room. She was the prettiest young lady I ever set eyes on, and she took them wiolets out of her cap and give them to me. She was in an awful way, and said she wanted to see you on a most important matter. I don't know what she wrote in the letter; but it may have been about the money, miss."

"Of course it was about the money," said Elma, who felt more and more uncomfortable each moment; "but where is the letter, Maggie? Why did I not get it?"

"You ask Miss Carrie that, miss. She come in, and— Oh, but I mustn't tell any more."

"But you must and shall," said Elma. She took hold of Maggie fiercely by her arm, dragged her forward to the light, and looked her full in the eyes. "Now, tell me every single thing you know, or I'll summon the police this moment," she said.

Thus adjured, Maggie fell on her knees and made an ample confession.

CHAPTER XV.

GWIN HARLEY'S SCHEME.

Elma felt nearly driven to distraction. All her future depended on the character which she was able to maintain at school. She did not, and she knew it, belong to the best class of girls who attended Middleton School. Elma's father was a man of bad reputation. He had long ago disgraced his

family, and had been obliged to go to Australia. Mrs. Lewis was better born than her husband; and when trouble came, a sister, who had been much shocked at her marrying Lewis, came to her aid. She did not do much for her; but she did something. This sister, a certain Mrs. Steward, the wife of a clergyman in Buckinghamshire, promised to look after Elma, who was the cleverest and most presentable of the two girls. Mrs. Lewis begged that Elma should not be taken away from her; and Mrs. Steward, angry with herself for what she termed her folly, had yet yielded to her sister's entreaties. She said she would give Elma what would be better than a fortune—namely, a first-class education; and if, when her education was finished, she showed intelligence, and, above all, a good, sterling, moral character, she would do what she could to place her in life. Her present intention was, after Elma had gone through a course of instruction at Middlton School, to send her to Girton, thus enabling her by and by to take a really good position as teacher.

All these things Elma knew well. She was an ambitious girl; she earnestly desired to secure a good position for herself in life. She hated her sister Carrie's ways, and detested the grumbling, weak sort of character which she could not but see that her mother possessed. All the same, she was not really scrupulous nor high-principled; it was only that the little mean ways and the petty shifts which went on in the small house in Constantine Road sorely fretted her. Her intercourse with girls like Gwin Harley and Bessie Challoner could not but raise her standard. Carrie's manners and ways disgusted her more and more each day.

Now, as she put on her hat and prepared to walk to Harley Grove, she could not help thinking, with great bitterness, of the unlooked-for calamity which had come upon her. She was naturally intensely selfish, and had no idea of sacrificing herself on this occasion. No matter to what subterfuge she must be obliged to stoop, she would never, never, let any of the Middleton girls know that she had broken the rule of the school, and borrowed money from Kitty. For a Middleton girl to borrow money at all was a black crime; but for any one to take advantage of Kitty's innocence, her *naïveté*, her wild, daring, reckless ways would make the crime all the blacker. Elma, were such a sin to be discovered, would be, if not expelled from the school, which was extremely likely, at any rate tabooed on the spot by all the nice girls who went there. Above all things, she longed for and esteemed popularity. Such a course of treatment would be intolerable. As a matter of course, Mrs. Steward would be told of her niece's transaction. Mrs. Steward would say, "Like father, like daughter." She would cease to patronize Elma. The fees for her schooling would be withdrawn, and Elma herself must sink to the level which Carrie had long ago reached.

"It cannot be," she thought; "whatever happens, I must keep this miserable story from the ears of the girls and

mistresses. At the present moment I am fairly safe. Wild and reckless as Kitty is, she would not dare to hold intercourse with any of the Middleton girls now. Alice is the only one allowed to speak to her, and Alice she will certainly not confide in, for she so cordially hates her. Yes, I know perfectly well what I am going to Harley Grove for. Gwin is full of sympathy for Kitty; so is Bessie Challoner. Romantic and silly they both are; but Alice at least will be on my side. I will oppose the petition which the Tug-of-war girls intend to send to Miss Sherrard. Kitty must not be set at liberty until I can return her the money. Carrie has it, beyond doubt. What she has done with it I don't know; but most likely I shall be able to give it back to Kitty to-morrow."

Having made up her mind, Elma walked briskly forward. She would, she felt certain, be very unpopular if she opposed the vote which, unless she did something to prevent it, would be carried by the majority in Kitty's favor. She was anxious to see some of the other Tug-of-war girls. It was all-important that a majority should be against Kitty, not for her.

When she arrived at the avenue which led to Harley Grove she met Alice, and a moment later two other girls of the names of Matilda and Jessie Forbes came pantingly up.

"Oh, do wait for us," they cried, seeing Elma and Alice linger for a moment at the gate.

"Alice," said Elma, "before they join us I want to speak to you. Are you for Kitty, or against her?"

"How do you mean?" asked Alice in some wonder.

"I mean, are you going to vote that this petition should be sent to Miss Sherrard or are you not?"

"I am going to vote against it, of course," said Alice, with a short laugh.

"Well, I am on your side; I wish to say so."

"You, Elma? I thought you would never oppose Gwin Harley. You are one of those people who know where their bread is buttered. Why do you take my part on this occasion?"

"Because," said Elma, flushing deeply, for, hardened little sinner as she was, she had not perfect control over her emotions—"because I think Kitty richly deserves what she has got. It would never do to have this sort of thing going on at the school. But look here, Alice, if the petition is not to be sent to Miss Sherrard, we must try and have a majority on our side. Why should we not secure Matilda and Jessie Forbes?"

"I never thought of that," said Alice; "but really, Elma, now I come to consider it, as far as I personally am concerned, I don't much care. It matters very little to me whether Kitty gets out of Coventry or not. I shall have to speak to her however the tide turns. You do seem strangely eager on the subject."

"When I join a certain side I don't wish it to be the losing one," said Elma, as calmly as she could.

"Hullo, Matilda, how out of breath you are! You need not have run so fast; you could see that we were waiting for you."

"Well, you see," said Jessie Forbes, who was also panting as she came up, "we have never yet been to Harley Grove. Is it not a very grand place, Elma? Was it not kind of Gwin to ask us, and— Oh, of course, we are full of sympathy for that poor, dear Kitty Malone."

"Why do you pity her?" asked Elma coldly.

"Because the poor darling didn't know any better. Does it not seem silly to make such a fuss about such a trifle? I can't imagine why Miss Sherrard has been so very severe."

"I don't agree with you at all," said Elma. "I think Kitty richly deserves her punishment. Of course," she added, "I don't want to be really hard on her; but unless she is made to feel shame when she does an *outré* and extraordinary thing like she did last night, she will go on doing similar deeds, and get the whole school into disgrace."

"Oh dear, yes," said Jessie, "that is perfectly true, and I should not like father to know that one of the Middleton girls had been spoken to by a rude boy in the street. I really believe he would take us both from the school."

"If you think so," said Elma, "you ought to oppose the petition."

"Are you going to, Elma?"

"Certainly?"

"But you are a friend of hers, are you not?"

"Of course I am. I am very fond of her."

"And you oppose it for her good?"

"Undoubtedly; altogether for her good."

"And Miss Sherrard does know what is right," said Matilda, in a thoughtful voice. "Miss Sherrard was never a severe teacher. We all love her dearly."

"And she is very fond of Kitty,' said Elma. "I know that for a fact."

"Yes, and so do I know it to my cost," said Alice shrugging her shoulders. She walked up the avenue as she spoke. Jessie ran after her.

"What side are you going to take Alice?" she asked.

"Miss Sherrard's," replied Alice shortly.

Meanwhile Elma had slipped her hand gently through Matilda's arm, and looking up into the face of the taller girl, said in her most insinuating voice:

"I do think, painful as it is, that we ought to take Miss Sherrard's side. Gwin is so enthusiastic, poor dear, and so is Bessie Challoner, that they are certain to be led away by their feelings. Now, Miss Sherrard is the most sympathetic and kindest of head-mistresses; she would not have given Kitty so severe a punishment without reason."

"That is true," said Matilda. "Only, of course, you see, Elma, I don't want to go against Gwin. I am so terribly anxious to become her friend. I admire her so immensely. I don't think there's any other girl in the school to equal her."

"I should think there isn't," said Elma with sudden warmth.

"I am sorry she has taken Kitty Malone's part—poor Kitty! We certainly all think her charming; but if father were to hear of it!"

"You would not like him to take you from the school now," said Elma, "just when you have such a good chance of the literature scholarship?"

"I should think not; it would be a dreadful blow. But he would be—oh, I cannot tell you how shocked he would be!"

"And he would be more shocked, would he not, if he heard that you had taken Kitty's part, and had signed the petition against Miss Sherrard?"

"Of course, I never thought of that. I declare, Elma, you are clever. I will mention what you say to Jessie, and tell her that she must go against the petition."

Elma felt that she had won her point. There would be at least four girls against Gwin's motion, and probably others would follow their example.

When the girls arrived at the house, they were shown immediately into Gwin's pretty private study. Gwin was standing by the open window. She had a book in her hand, but was not reading it. She was looking anxiously out. There was a perplexed expression on her fine face, and her large deep gray eyes were full of emotion.

"I am so glad you have come," she said when she saw the girls. "I hope all the Tug-of-War girls will be present. The more I think of this affair the more certain I am that it will be the ruin of Kitty Malone."

Elma looked sympathizingly at her friend, Alice frowned, Matilda and Jessie did not know where to look, nor what to say. If they had not met Alice and Elma they would have certainly gone heart and soul with Gwin in the matter.

"Sit down, won't you, girls?" said Gwin. "Tea will be ready in a moment—are you not thirsty?"

"Yes, it's a very hot day," said Jessie, somewhat timidly.

"And you had a long walk; but it was really kind of you to come. We won't do anything until some more of the Tug-of-war Society arrive. But perhaps my letters have not reached the others."

"Oh, I know the Hodgsons are coming," said Matilda Forbes, "because I met thim."

"I am glad of that. Ah, and here is Bessie."

Bessie Challoner at this moment entered the room. She shook hands with the Forbes girls, whom she had not met before that day, nodded to Alice, and going up to Gwin began to whisper in her ear.

Gwin looked more anxious.

"All the same I am determined to do it," she said.

"I am certain Miss Sherrard will be very angry," said Bessie. "Had you really better, Gwin?"

"I certainly had better. I am not afraid of Miss Sherrard,

nor twenty Miss Sherrards, when I think I have a righteous cause. She does not know Kitty as well as I know her. Ah, here you are," she said as the Hodgsons, two rather dowdy, but affectionate, girls came quickly into the room.

"What's this, Gwin?" cried Mary, the elder; "something wrong with that Irish girl? What can be up?"

"I will explain everything to you after we have had tea. Ah, here it comes!"

Gwin walked to the table, where the footman now placed tea and cakes, and began to dispense the refreshments. The girls stood round her chatting, munching cake and drinking tea. The afternoon sun poured into the room. Outside it was cool and shady. Gwin went to the window and drew down the green Venetian blinds.

"Now, that is cooler," she said. "Have you all had enough?"

"Yes, thank you," answered one or two.

Gwin rang the bell, and the servant came to remove the tea equipage.

"And now to business," said Gwin. "What I briefly propose to do is this: Kitty Malone is in trouble. As a member of the Tug-of-war Society, the rest of the society is bound to support her. I am most anxious that she should get all the support in our power. She is not like any of us; she has been differently brought up. What she did last night was the result of impetuosity and overzeal. She was troubled about her brother, and for some extraordinary reason thought that Elma could help her. Elma, can you throw any light on the matter?"

"None whatever," answered Elma in a stout voice.

"She went out with the college cap on and without her jacket, and for that reason some rough, rude boys talked to her, and she knocked one of them down in trying to defend herself, and so got into a terrible scrape. Miss Worrick, it seems, witnessed the transaction, and she told Miss Sherrard. Miss Sherrard was very much annoyed, and has put Kitty into Coventry for a week. We are none of us allowed, on pain of instant dismissal, to speak to her. Now, my proposal is this; that we write a little petition, and each of us sign it, and then that I take it to Miss Sherrard. I want to ask Miss Sherrard to allow the members of the Tug-of-war Society to speak to Kitty. I want to ask her to allow us all to do our best during her week's punishment to show her that this wild and erratic way will not go down in England; I want her to allow us to do our utmost by kindness to overcome Kitty's wild nature. I have scarcely any doubt, girls, that Miss Sherrard will approve of our scheme."

"Well, I for one approve of it most heartily," said Bessie Challoner. "I believe severity would ruin a girl like Kitty. You cannot drive her; she must be led."

"Thank you, Bessie. I knew you would feel with me.

And now, girls, I will put this thing to the vote. All who are in favor of the scheme hold up their hands."

The Forbes girls looked tremblingly, with flushed cheeks and glittering eyes, at Elma and Alice. Their hands went half up and then dropped again into their laps. It was the fear of their father's displeasure which prevented their going altogether with Gwin. The Hodgson girls immediately held up their hands; but Alice, Elma, Matilda, and Jessie plainly showed that they did not mean to sign the petition.

"Is this possible?" said Gwin in a vexed voice. "I surely thought there was not— Elma, you must be at the head of this. What is your reason for not joining us?"

Alice looked as if she were about to speak; but Elma jumped to her feet.

"I don't join you because I do not agree with you, dear Gwin. I believe Miss Sherrard knows a great deal better than we do what is good for a girl. I am certain she will be much annoyed by our interfering; and for my part I think a week in Coventry will do Kitty Malone no harm."

"I am surprised and disappointed in you, Elma," said Gwin, "Alice, what is your feeling?"

"Oh, I absolutely agree with Elma," said Alice. "I think it would be a rare comfort to take any means to subdue and crush out of sight, even for one week, that most obnoxious person Kitty Malone. The unfortunate part is that I shall have to do with her even during her week in Coventry."

"But surely," said Gwin, in some astonishment, "you two Forbes girls can have nothing to say against Kitty. It cannot injure you in any way that we should plead for the mitigation of her punishment."

"Well, the fact is this," said Jessie, standing up as she spoke, and looking very miserable. "Father is most particular; he is almost faddy, you know, Gwin—and if he ever heard that a girl from the school did exactly what Kitty did last night—I mean that she went out so late against rules, and was dressed in such a queer way, and was obliged to knock down a rude boy in order to protect herself—why, I think he would take us from school. Then if father also heard that we had gone against Miss Sherrard's authority, we— Oh, I cannot say it exactly as I ought; but Gwin, I would rather not sign that paper."

"All right," answered Gwin in some vexation. "Then my scheme falls through. Four against and four for. We have only one other member of the Tug-of-war except poor Kitty herself, and she, I am afraid, cannot come, as she is ill with a bad cold. Well, I shall see Miss Sherrard alone and must take my chance."

"Yes, if you please; that would be much the best plan," said Jessie, sinking down into her seat with a sigh of relief.

Soon afterward the little party at Gwin Harley's home separated. There was a feeling of restraint over them

which Gwin's guests seldom experienced. They were not at one. It was impossible to talk any longer on the subject with which their hearts were full. Gwin was anxious to prepare the exact arguments she intended to use with Miss Sherrard. She looked relieved when Elma made the first move of departure. Alice jumped up also with alacrity.

"Good-by, Gwin," she said. "I think you are doing wrong to interfere in this matter. A little punishment will do Kitty Malone no more harm than it does any other girl. Of course it's not pleasant; punishment never is. Good-bye; take my advice and allow Kitty Malone to shift for herself."

Gwin made no reply at all to this. She gave Alice a cold nod, and the four girls who now formed the opposition left the house.

"Good-by to all chance of my friendship with Gwin," said Jessie Forbes rather miserably as they walked up the avenue.

"Oh, never mind, Jessie; you did the right thing," said Alice. "What is the good of toadying? I hate toadies. If you are ever to become a friend of Gwin Harley's you will see that she hates them also, although perhaps I am wrong to say that." Here she glanced somewhat significantly at Elma. Elma colored and turned her head aside.

When they reached the top of the avenue the girls turned each to go their several ways. Elma hurried home as fast as she could.

"I must get that money by hook or by crook this evening," she said to herself. "I wonder where Carrie has hidden it. Bad as she is, she would certainly not steal it from me. Oh, it is safe, of course, and I must get it and manage to convey it to Kitty to-night, and then as far as I am concerned I don't care how soon the poor thing gets out of Coventry."

When Elma reached home the first person she saw was Carrie. Carrie was standing on the steps of the shabby little villa in Constantine Road talking to a fiery-haired young man.

Elma never condescended to have anything to do with Raynes. Giving him a very cold nod now, she was about to enter the house when Carrie caught her arm and stopped her.

"Why don't you speak to Sam?" she said. "Sam, this is my sister, Elma."

"How do you do?" said Elma. "I am sorry I cannot wait now; I want to see mother."

"There's no use in your going in if it's mother you want," pursued Carrie. "She has gone out for the evening. Mrs. Duncan has asked her to tea. I am glad of it. A little change will do her good."

"I won't keep you now, Car," say Raynes, turning to Carrie and giving her a somewhat clumsy nod. He looked askance at Elma, and the next moment had clattered down the steps, and, turning the corner, was out of sight.

"What a creature!" said Elma. "I wonder you have

anything to do with him, Carrie. I think, even for my sake, seeing that Aunt Charlotte is doing so much for me——"

"Now stop that," said Carrie; "I won't have a word of abuse against Sam. He suits me very well. I'm not a fine lady, and I never mean to be a fine lady. I shall be very comfortable as his wife some day, and I don't want you to abuse him. Whether you like him or not, he is going to be your brother-in-law and— Why, Elma, how tired you look!"

"I am tired and worried, and I want to speak to you," said Elma.

"To speak to me?" answered Carrie, a little alarm coming into her voice in spite of herself. "What for? Anything special? Are you prepared to make me a present of another dress; I could do with a white one now the weather is getting so very hot, and Sam would like me in white. White with pink ribbons would be a change, or mauve—mauve ribbons look so sweetly cool with white."

"I am not going to listen to any of your nonsense," said Elma. "I want to ask you a straight question. Where is my money?"

"Your money? What do you mean?"

"What I say. I have heard the whole story from Maggie, and I can bring her as a witness. You have put that money in hiding, and I want it at once. There, Carrie, like a dear old soul, do own up. Let me have the money without any more delay. Of course you have not stolen it. I know you have not; but you have hidden it. I wish you would give it back now. If I can't return it to its rightful owner to-night I shall get into worse trouble. Do let me have the money back."

Carrie's face also now became pale.

"I wish I could," she said in a frightened voice. "Do you mean to say that you really want it back?"

"Why, of course. You haven't spent it? Oh, if you have I am ruined—ruined for life."

"No, I have not spent it; but the fact is I— What a little wretch that Maggie was to tell!"

"She couldn't help herself; I made her. Now, speak out, Carrie. Oh, we need not go indoors. Where is the money? Please, please, Carrie, let me have it at once."

Elma's troubled face, her trembling hands, the anxiety depicted all over her nervous little figure, could not but show Carrie that there was something serious in the wind.

"Well," she said. "I am awfully sorry. I—I just did it in a fit of mischief. I read that letter which Kitty Malone wrote to you, and it seemed to throw light on some of your actions which had puzzled me of late. I went to your drawer and found the money, and thought I would give it to Sam to keep for you."

"To Sam Raynes?" cried Elma, backing a few steps, her voice assuming a tone of terror.

"Yes. Do be careful, Elma, or you'll fall right down into the area. Why shouldn't I lend it to Sam Raynes?"

"Lend it?"

"Well, well, it's all the same; I asked him to keep it for me."

"I'll go to him at once and get it," said Elma, preparing to run down the steps.

Carrie caught her by the arm.

"I'm awfully sorry," she said, "but it's no use, he—he says we cannot have it for a week, perhaps a fortnight. He is doing a little deal with it, as he expresses it. He says perhaps we'll have it back doubled."

"What can you mean, Carrie?" Elma knew nothing whatever about speculation. The will-o'-the-wisp which leads so many astray had not yet entered into her life.

"You need not look so miserable. Won't you like to have it back again, not seven pounds but fourteen? and Sam says this will probably be the case in a week or a fortnight, or at any rate in a month from now."

Elma threw up her hand in despair.

"If I have to wait a month for the money," she said, "I may as well never have it. Oh, Carrie, what have you done? You have ruined me, ruined me! Carrie, I cannot lead a low, common life like yours; I am not fit for it. Oh, Aunt Charlotte will never do anything more for me after this. Kitty wants the money, and I cannot give it to her. Oh, Carrie, to think that you should have ruined my life!"

Poor Elma covered her face with her trembling hands and went into the house. She entered the shabby little sitting-room and sank into the nearest chair. Carrie stood near her in real perplexity and agitation.

"What a pity you didn't confide in me when you brought it home," she said. "Of course I didn't really want to do you an ill turn, Elma; but you were so sly and secretive, and—and I thought I would have my joke. You don't know how precious dull my life is; and when I saw that letter and felt that you were keeping a nice little hoard of money, all private and without the knowledge of your sister, it was just too much for me, and I took it to Sam because I didn't know where to hide it safe in this house."

"The thing that matters," said Elma, "is the fact that I cannot get it back. But I must get it; I must see Sam Raynes at once."

"Tell me why it is so bad," said Carrie. "You must confide the whole thing to me now. There's no use in keeping secrets from your sister."

Thus adjured, and because she was almost distracted, poor Elmo did tell. She described as well as she could the terrible position she would be in at Middleton School if the whole of this transaction were known. She managed to a certain extent to open Carrie's eyes.

"Although, I cannot see what they would be so angry

about," said Carrie. "You were offered the money and you accepted it. You never wanted to keep it; you would have given it back some time; and even if you did keep that Irish girl out of it for a month, what would it have mattered? But there—I see you are in a state, and I am sure I don't want to ruin your life. You, with your high-faluting notions, must not have all your ambitions dashed to the ground. We'll go together to see Sam, and try to find out what can be done."

"Yes, let us go at once," said Elma in feverish haste. "I wanted to take the money to Kitty to-night. At present she cannot tell on me; but she is quite certain to do so if I don't return it to her at once. Let us go down and see Sam now."

"All right," answered Carrie; "come along. I dare say we'll find him at home. I hope we shall."

Five minutes later the girls were standing outside the door of the Raynes' very humble dwelling. It was opened by Florrie Raynes herself.

"Hullo, Carrie, what do you want now?" she cried. "Oh, and *Miss* Lewis," with a mocking emphasis on the word "Miss." "To what do we owe the honor of this visit?"

"I want to see your brother," said Elma brusquely. "He has got some money of mine, which I must ask him to have the goodness to return at once."

"Money?" said Florrie, opening her eyes rather wide. "Well, you can see him for yourselves; but if it's money that is lent to Sam, I—I rather pity the girl who wants to get it back from him again. Sam is a very whale on money. He always swallows it wholesale."

With these anything but encouraging words, Florrie threw open the door of the shabby little smoking-room, where Sam, with a pipe in his mouth, was lying at his ease. He started up when he saw the girls, removed his pipe, and going up to Carrie, laid his hand familiarly on her shoulder.

"Well, Car, so you could not do without me," he said with a smile.

"The fact is this," answered Elma, "my sister has told me that she gave you seven pounds a couple of nights ago to keep for her. That money happens to have been lent to me, and I want it back immediately. I have come for it. Will you give it to me, please?"

Sam drew in his breath preparatory to giving a long whistle.

"Highty! tighty!" he cried. "You have very grand airs, Miss Elma Lewis; but I didn't know that money was borrowed. Ho! ho! this puts a very unpleasant complexion on things. When dear old Car brought it to me I thought I might do what I liked with it. Did you not give me to understand as much, Car?" Here he gave Carrie a perceptible wink. She was very much under his influence, and immediately took her cue.

"Well, yes, Sam," she answered. "I did say you might speculate with it if you liked."

"Of course you did, my little girl, and I took the hint and did speculate with it, and a pretty little deal I made. So if you have patience, Miss Elma, you will get your money back doubled, then you will be able to return the principal and have a nice little nest-egg of your own. Now, what do you say to that? Aren't you awfully obliged to me?"

"I say," replied Elma, "that I want the money immediately. I cannot wait until you have doubled it, as you call it, whatever you mean by that. Please let me have it at once, Mr. Raynes. I must have it, I——"

"I am afraid you ask for the impossible," said Sam in a careless tone. "I have speculated with the money, and the returns will come in perhaps in a week, perhaps a fortnight, perhaps longer. I say again that you ought to be obliged to me. It is not every fellow who would take so much trouble."

Poor Elma gave him a despairing glance. There was evidently nothing more to be got out of him. She left the house without a word. Carrie followed her into the street.

"Oh, Elma, don't look so miserable," said Carrie. "What is the good of sinking into despair?"

"Don't talk to me," said Elma, pushing her sister's hand away. "You have ruined me; that is the sort of sister you are. And I would have done anything for you, Carrie. When I rose myself and improved myself in the social scale, when I got my post as teacher, I would have done all in my power to aid you and mother; but now—now we must all sink together. Oh, Carrie, to think that I should be ruined by my own sister!"

CHAPTER XVI.

PADDY WHEEL-ABOUT'S OLD COAT.

It was a moonlit evening in the County Donegal, and there was a broad bar of silver shining in burnished splendor across the beautiful Lake Coulin. Two boys were standing on the edge of the lake. A prettily-trimmed little boat was lying at their feet. One, the taller of the two, was standing with his hand up to his ear, listening intently.

"Ah, then, Pat, can't you stop that shuffling?" he cried to his younger companion. "I can't listen if you keep whistling and moving your feet. It is about time for Daneen to appear. Kitty is sure to send the tinos, dear old girl. Father takes care to keep her well supplied."

"There, I hear Dan's horn; he is coming through the Gap," cried Pat, his face lighting up. "Stay there, Laurie, and I'll run to meet him. He'll just be at the other side of Haggart's Glen when I get up."

The younger boy put wings to his feet, and the next mo-

ment was out of sight. The older boy, thrusting both his hands deep into his pockets, stood staring straight before him into the silver light caused by a full moon. The white radiance lit up his young person, his pronounced features, and handsome face. There were gloomy depths in his big black eyes, although the slightest movement, the faintest play of expression would cause them to dance with vitality and fun; the petulant expression, round lips, curved and cut with the delicacy of a cameo, was very manifest. The lad was built in almost Herculean mold, so broad were his shoulders, so upright and tall his young figure. With his head thrown back, the listening attitude on his face, his black hair swept from his forehead, he looked almost like a young god—all was *verve*, expectancy, eagerness in his attitude.

"If only Kitty is true it will be all right," he muttered. "Ah, then, what a fool I was when I allowed the other fellows to tempt me to play that practical joke on old Wheelabout. I don't think the governor minds anything else; but he cannot stand our making fun of that poor, old, half-witted chap. Never again will I do such a thing. I would not have father know this matter for all the world. Hullo! there comes Pat. I wonder if he has got my letter."

"Nothing, nothing, and worse than nothing," sang out Pat, extending two empty hands as he approached.

"No letter for me?" cried Laurie. He stepped out of the light, and striding up to his brother, laid one of his big hands on the boy's slighter shoulder.

"No letter? But did you really meet Daneen?"

"Of course I did. Don't grip me so hard, old chap. He had only one letter in his pocket, and that was for Aunt Honora, two newspapers for father, and a heap of circulars —nothing else whatever."

"But are you certain sure? Surely Kitty would not fail a gossoon when he was in trouble."

"I tell you, Laurie, there was nothing from her, nor from any one, except that one letter for Aunt Honora; but perhaps you'll hear in the morning."

Laurie made no reply; his hands dropped to his sides. The next moment he dived into his trousers pocket and extracted a few coins.

"Have we enough for a telegram, I wonder?" he said. "Ah, to be sure—why, we can send one now for sixpence. And I have tenpence here. I'll wire at once. I say, Pat, we must go to the nearest post-office, and to-night. We will start now; do you mind? We can row across the Coulin, and anchor the boat at the opposite side, and then it is only eight miles across the mountains to Ballyshannon."

"But James Donovan will have shut up the office," exclaimed Pat; "and if we are absent from supper what will father say?"

"Old Jim knows us; he'll open fast enough when he hears that we two lads have come on business."

"But they can't send the telegram after the office is shut."

"Don't make difficulties, Pat. I tell you this is a serious business. You don't want to be banished the country, do you? We'll go to the post-office at once, and see that the message is sent to Kitty the very first thing in the morning. Come, what are you lingering for?"

"Supper is waiting, and Aunt Bridget will make a fuss. You know we are not allowed to be out after ten at night."

"Bother!" cried Laurie. "Well, then we must go home first. What a nuisance! We'll have a bite, and then slink out. The dad can think we have gone to bed. Why, Pat, old boy, I met Wheel-about to-day, and he was like a madman. He told me he had collected all that money for his funeral. What apes we were to touch the coat!"

"Sure, it's unlike Kitty not to write," said Pat. "She is the last in the world to leave a fellow in the lurch."

"Don't I know that? Whose fault it is it isn't hers, poor old girl. Something has happened to the letter. Now, Pat, let us get supper over, for we have no time to lose."

As Laurie spoke he fastened the little boat securly by a rope to a stone near by, and then the lads turned their backs upon the silver-burnished lake, and strode into the darkness of a narrow mountain defile. The path was steep, and they had to scramble up, doing so with the agility of young ponies.

"It is the thought of Wheel-about that bothers me entirely," said Laurie, after a pause. "I don't want to have it lying on my soul—upon my honor I don't—that I turned the poor old chap's brain still crazier."

"Oh, the money will come along before Saturday," said Pat; "and you know you told him he must wait until Saturday. Don't you worry, Laurie. Come on, I tell ye; there's the gong sounding at the Castle."

The deep notes of a very sonorous old gong were distinctly borne on the breeze; the boys ran, hurrying and panting. A few moments later they had climbed an almost inaccessible rock, had tumbled over each other up a lawn, and entered a huge hall, where supper was spread. Squire Malone was seated at the head of the table; down both sides were crowded guests and different retainers—Squire Malone's cousins, all of them, some to the fifth or sixth removed. Miss Honora Malone was at the foot of the table, and Miss Bridget presided at the tea tray at one of the sides.

"Sit down, you lads," roared the squire when he saw his sons; "you have been keeping us waiting. Now take your places and fall to."

The boys dropped into the seats reserved for them without a word. They were hungry, and enjoyed the abundant fare provided. Miss Honora began to address them with a volley of words.

"Ah, then, boys," she said, "it is ashamed of you I am. Why should you come in to supper like that, without your

hair brushed or your hands washed and looking as rough as a pair of young colts? Look at me, now, how neat I am —I have changed my dress for the evening." As she spoke she glanced at her thin arms, bare to the elbow, and touched the gold chain that encircled her scraggy throat. "You'll never get Dublin manners, you two," she continued. "and what will you do when you go into society? Ah, it is enough to break the heart to look at ye."

Laurie winked boldly at her; Pat laughed, and helped himself to some potatoes.

"Dennis," called out the lady, addressing her brother, "don't you agree with me that it is very bad manners on the part of the boys to come to supper without so much as washing their hands or brushing their hair? Ought they not to put on evening clothes now that they are almost assuming manhood's estate?"

"Oh, leave 'em alone, Honor," was the reply. "Boys will be boys, and Castle Malone is Liberty Hall. Time enough a few years hence to put on that high-faluting style. I like 'em as they are: rough diamonds no doubt, but diamonds all the same."

The old man looked fondly at his sons. He was a picturesque-looking figure, with snow-white hair.

"What will you do, lads, when I send you to England to school?" he said.

"England, father?" said Pat, turning pale. "It would kill me to leave the soil on which I was born. Ah, now, father, I could not live through it; and as to Laurie, why he would— Laurie, you know what you would do."

"Oh, father's joking," said Laurie, but his face went a little white, and as he drained off a great glass of ice-cold water his hand trembled a trifle.

"It would not be for the making of our happiness, father," he said, just glancing at his father. "Pat is right—it would about kill us both."

"You young beggars, kill you, indeed!" cried the squire. "Well, I have not made my plans yet. I am thinking of it, and you may as well know it. I have sent the girleen away, and if you can't stand what she can, why, I don't think you have much grit in you. As to Pat, when he's a little older he'll have to prepare for the army."

"Ay, and that's a fine polishing up," said Aunt Bridget, bridling as she spoke, and arranging the set of her very fashionable sleeve. "My jewel of a lad, you'll know what life is like then. You'll think a deal of your clothes, and of the sort of thing that will kill the girls then. Why, if you know how to manage, and with my help I dare say I can contrive it for you, you'll get easily into the very height of Dublin society, and be petted, and spoiled, and coaxed no end. I wonder, now, how that girleen is conducting herself. Sometimes, Dennis, when I look at you and think how your heart is wrapped up in her and how she is, so to speak, the

jewel of your eye and the core of your heart I wonder how you had the courage to let her go."

"Don't you worry me about it," cried the squire. "I did it for her good. Laurie, where are you off to?"

"I have had about enough supper," answered Laurie. Pat also scrambled to his feet.

"You are as ill-mannered a pair of young cubs as I ever came across," cried Miss Honora, now really angry. "Why, the syllabub is coming on soon, and the trifle, and the cream that I whipped myself. Well, Pat, you'll have to mend your manners when you get into the army; and as to you, Laurie, you'll never be as good a squire as your father, try hard as you may."

A loud laugh at the head of the table interrupted the good lady's flow of words.

"Honora, my woman, you are talking to the air," called out the squire. "The boys are out of earshot. Bless 'em, can't you let 'em be? They are hearty lads, and I don't think I'll send either of them out of the country unless they happen to displease me."

Meanwhile the lads had gone down to the lake, unshipped the little boat, and were by this time half across the Coulin. They soon reached the opposite shore, jumped to land, pulled up the boat, fastened it, and started along a long narrow and mountainous path which was the shortest cut to Ballyshannon. They walked so quickly and the hill was so steep that they had little or no time for words. Nor were they boys who talked much when they were alone. Laurie was given to his own meditations. Pat was always planning some scheme which should circumvent Aunt Honora, who lived with them, and annoy Aunt Bridget, who nearly lived with them, although not quite. Aunt Bridget was the most fashionable member of the family; her real home was in Dublin. She was the one who had worked upon the squire's feelings until he had decided to send Kitty to an English school. Pat was not fond of either of his aunts, but he disliked Aunt Bridget the most. After an hour-and-a-half's brisk walking they reached Ballyshannon, knocked up the postmaster, who had gone to bed, asked him to let them in, and confided to him what they wanted. He was a hearty-looking Irishman, and was soon as much interested in the telegram which Laurie was to send as the boy was himself.

"You have heard what a scrape I have got into?" said Laurie.

"About that poor, mad fellow?" said James Dunovan.

"Yes; some other fellows and I stole his coat away in a fit of frolic that day when we were out in the crazy boat on the Coulin. A sudden breeze got up and the boat upset; and the coat—bad luck to it—sank to the bottom like a stone. We have tried to get it up, but it is all no go; it has got right into the mud, and not all the boys in Ireland could

move it. If the squire heard we had played a trick on Wheel-about he would just do what I don't want him to."

"And what may that be, Master Laurie?"

"Why, Jim, he would banish me to England. You think of that!"

"Ah, to be sure, sir; and it would be a hard punishment entirely, and all for a boy's freak. But how can you circumvent him, sir? that's the puzzle, for old Wheel-about is as sly a fellow as walks. He knows his power with the squire—there's a story about, but I have not got the rights of it. Anyhow, the squire is always trying to help him. If he cannot get his coat in which he has hidden all his money he will go raving mad about the country, and the squire will soon get at the bottom of the mischief."

"Oh, that's all right," answered Laurie. "I saw there was no help for it, and I took Wheel-about into my confidence. He promised if I gave him ten pounds by Saturday next to let the matter of the coat slip by. He said he would never tell."

"I wonder now if the craychur is to be trusted," muttered Jim, in a thoughtful tone.

"Oh, yes, he is, Jim; don't you meet trouble halfway. If once he gets the money everything will be as right as possible. But this 'gram must go off, and you must see to it for me."

"I'll do that, sir, and welcome, the very moment the office opens its doors in the morning."

"How soon do you think it will reach my sister?"

"Well, to be sure, I expect in about half an hour or an hour at the most. I often think I'd like to see them messages a-tumbling along the wires. Do you believe as they go by the wires, sir?"

"Oh, I suppose so; I don't bother my head about it. Now, then, Jim, hand us a form and we'll fill it in. What do you think we had best say, Pat?"

"Make it strong," said Pat.

"Yes, I know that." Laurie stood biting the end of his pencil and considering the blank form which Jimmy had provided him with.

"We must make it powerful strong," he said after a pause. "If dad hears this, we two are about done, Pat. He's the easiest odd boy in the world, but when once he takes the bit between his teeth he is just like Slieve Loon, our new mare. But I must not keep you up, Jim; you are wanting to get back to your bed."

"It don't matter, sir; don't you hurry yourself. I told the wife it was two of the young gentlemen from Castle Malone, and she said I wasn't to mind how much time I spent with you; it was only proper respect to the family."

"All right, Jim. Now, then, Pat, what shall I say?"

"Hurry up," said Pat; "if you're not sleepy I am, and the whole house will be locked up if we are not quick."

"I cracked a pane of glass in our window on purpose this morning," said Laurie. "I thought it might turn out convenient."

Pat laughed. Laurie, his face flushed, bent over the telegraph form. After a time, during which beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead, the following message was transcribed:

"MISS KITTY MALONE, care of Mrs. Denvers, Franklin Avenue, Middleton, London, S. E.—Wake up, old girleen; hurry with the tin.—LAURIE."

"That's the time of day," he said. "You read it, Jim. Can you make out the address plain?"

"Yes, to be sure," answered Jim. "Very well, sir; this shall go. I am sorry you're in trouble, sir; but I know the squire sends a lot of money to Miss Kitty, for he is always coming here for postal orders."

"Oh, I am safe to have it," said Laurie. "Well, good-night Jim, and long life to you."

The boys left the office and retraced their steps across the mountain. They had gone about half-way home when they were interrupted by a curious sort of sound, something between a croon and a chant. It came nearer and nearer, and the next moment a grotesque figure showed clearly in the moonlight. This was no other than Paddy Wheel-about himself. He was a tall man, with a long, shaggy beard, penthouse eyebrows, and eyes which were lit now with a fitful and uncertain gleam. He was dressed in rags, his hat was pushed far back on his head, his hair streamed over his shoulders. The savage and yet pathetic-looking creature stopped now before the two boys.

"I say, Paddy, it is all right," said Laurie, going up to him and laying his hand on his shoulder. "You'll get the tin I promised either to-morrow morning or the day after. I have just sent a telegram to the girleen in England. Why, Kitty wouldn't let you suffer; no, not if it were to break her heart."

A wild and yet softened look came into the man's eyes.

"It is because of the girleen I'm fretting," he said. "Listen, you two, I feel fit to die sometimes when I think the coat is lost, and it is all on account of the girleen herself. Why, it was she put in the last patch and a bit of gold was hidden in it; yes, and she sewed it round with her own pretty hands, the darling."

"We'll get back the coat some day, see if we don't," said Laurie. "And meanwhile, Paddy, you are safe to have your money on Saturday."

"All right if I do," said Paddy; "if not it is all wrong. I go to Squire Malone. Yes, I go to Squire Malone; but I'll wait until Saturday. I promise that much, and I'll keep my word."

"You'll keep your word for Kitty's sake?" said Laurie.

The man nodded; again his eyes softened and changed in expression, the next moment he had turned on his heel and was out of sight.

"I do believe the only person he cares for in the world is Kitty," said Laurie. "Do you remember when he was so ill he would only allow Kitty to visit him? I say, Pat, we must get back that coat somehow; but in the meantime the ten pounds will keep matters quiet."

CHAPTER XVII.

"WE ARE BOTH IN THE SAME BOAT."

Gwin had explained all her points, and Miss Sherrard had listened to her with indulgence, sympathy, and comprehension. They were seated together in Miss Sherrard's charming little sitting-room.

"I am glad you take such an interest in Kitty," she said when the girl had stopped speaking.

"I do. She is uncommon; she is unlike anybody else," said Gwin Harley. "I hope," she added, looking anxiously at the head-mistress, "that you will feel it right so far to mitigate her punishment as to allow the Tug-of-war girls to talk to her. This seems just the time for a society of this sort to help its members."

"There's a great deal in what you say, Gwin; but all the same, to my regret, I am obliged distinctly to refuse your request."

Gwin's face, which had been slightly flushed, now turned pale. She rose to her feet.

"Don't be hurt with me, dear," said the mistress in a gentle voice. "I admire you for your kindness, Gwin, and I can also see the thing from your point of view; but all the same Middleton School is a very important one; there are from six to seven hundred girls here. Most of these girls have got parents; all have got guardians and friends. It would not do for them to know that such a wild and reckless act as Kitty Malone has perpetrated should be passed over without a severe punishment. Kitty will live through this week of isolation and be all the better for it. At the end of that time you Tug-of-war girls can do all in your power to help her. For this one week I must insist on her living in Coventry. She will do her lessons, of course, for it would not be at all wise to give her a holiday; but no girl belonging to the school with the exception of Alice must speak to her."

"I am sorry; and you will forgive me for saying, without any disrespect to you, that I think you are wrong," answered Gwin. She now held out her hand to Miss Sherrard. Miss Sherrard took it and pressed it gently.

"You are a very good girl, Gwin; and I wish with all my heart and soul that I could grant your request."

Meanwhile Kitty had returned to the Denvers' house in a whirl of passionate protest and indignation. She could not understand why she had been punished. The sin she had committed did not seem to be any sin at all to her. What did it matter how she dressed or when she went out? The fact that she had broken a very strict rule of Middleton School did not affect her. She was now seriously unhappy —the fetters with which she was surrounded tortured her. How could she live through the terrible week of isolation? And what made her more wretched than anything else was the fact that she could not see Elma in order to get the money from her to send to Laurie.

Kitty and Laurie had always been more than ordinary friends. The thoughts of each were known to the heart of the other. If there was one person in the wide world whom Kitty loved with passion, almost with idolatry, it was her handsome brother Laurie. The bare idea that Laurie should plead to Kitty to help him, and that Kitty would be obliged to turn a deaf ear to his entreaties was enough to madden the reckless girl.

The whole of that afternoon she spent in her bedroom, pacing up and down like a young caged tiger. Mrs. Denvers went to talk to her, but Kitty would not speak. She would pour out her troubles to no one. Her proud Irish heart felt as if it would burst from misery; but she would not stoop to the sympathy of those who, she felt, could not possibly understand her.

Of all the Denver family, she liked Fred the best; and when he ventured to knock at her door in the course of the evening she did not refuse to open it to him.

"Come along down-stairs at once, Kitty," said Fred, holding out his hand to her.

"I would rather stay where I am, Fred asthore."

"I say it's a beastly shame to have you treated like this."

"Oh, don't begin to sympathize with me," said Kitty; "if you do, I'll cry the ocean full of tears. I am holding them back hard now. You don't know what a thing it is when an Irish girl fairly gives way."

"Well, they're beastly hard on you; but I'm sure I would not cry if I were you," said Fred. "I'd just be too proud. But come down-stairs to my den, Kitty; I have made it awfully comfortable."

"Your den?" said Kitty, her eyes lighting up; "have you got one?"

"Yes; it's not in the house; it's in the garden, at the further end. It's a shed; but I have made it water-proof, and I have got a little lamp, an oil one; and we can sit there and have a jolly talk."

For a moment Kitty's eyes sparkled with renewed hope.

"And I have still got some chocolates in my drawer," she exclaimed. "We might eat them together and have a real good time. But oh, that money! it's the money that's bothering me entirely. Oh dear! dear! I'll let the whole thing out if I talk any more to you, Fred. Fred, it's the true comfort you are to me, and I'll never forget it to the longest day I live; but I can't go to that shed with you, gossoon asthore, for if I did I'd let out everything."

"But why shouldn't you let out everything?" said Fred. "There's something bothering you, and you're keeping it all to yourself."

"But I promised I wouldn't tell, and I don't want to break my word. I said when she asked me, 'No; I can't keep secrets'; but then it was put in such a way that I must keep it. I can't go with you, Fred; pray don't ask me again. Good-bye to you, and thank you, thank you."

Kitty ran into her room, shut the door, locked it, and retreated to the window, to be as far as possible from Fred's insinuating voice and ways.

Mr. and Mrs. Denvers were out again that night, and the time dragged terribly. Kitty wondered how she was to live through a whole week of this torture.

"I promised Elma that I would not tell about her asking me for that money," she said to herself. "I wish I hadn't said so now; but she seemed so earnest, and I really thought nothing of it at that time. Oh dear, dear! I wonder she dose not bring it to me. She must be the meanest of the mean. I never liked her; but now I hate her. Poor, poor dear old Wheel-about! Don't I know what he is feeling, and what Laurie is feeling, my broth of a boy, my Laurie, asthore! Oh, to think that he is in trouble, and I can't help him! How I wish I was back in Ireland now! This will break my heart—it will break my heart."

Tears filled her eyes; but she was too proud to let them roll over.

"I will keep them back if I die for it," she said to herself. "I am Kitty Malone, and they will break my heart if this goes on; but I won't cry. No, that I won't."

While these thoughts were coursing through the poor girl's brain, there came another knock at the door; an insistent and somewhat fierce one this time. The handle was sharply turned, and the clear voice of Alice was heard.

"Open the door at once, please, Kitty," she said.

Kitty crossed the room, turned the key in the lock, and allowed Alice to enter.

"I must beg of you, Kitty," said Alice, "not to lock the door again."

"And why not, pray? You locked it last night. It was on account of that I am now in all this trouble."

"Really, Kitty, you are quite too ridiculous; as if I were the cause of your trouble. You are in trouble because you disobeyed a strict rule; and my locking the door or not had

nothing whatever to do with it. You are quite the most tiresome, inconsistent girl I ever came across."

"Well, it is nothing to you what I am," said Kitty. She sank down on a chair by the side of her little bed as she spoke; her expression was so woebegone, her face so pale, the droop of her eyes so pathetic, that Alice was slightly touched in spite of herself.

"I am going to see Bessie Challoner," she said. "If you were different I would not leave you."

"Oh, never mind me, pray."

"All the same, I would not leave you, Kitty; for remember I am the only girl belonging to the school who may speak to you for the next week; but, really, your ways are so unpleasant——"

"And I so infinitely prefer your absence to your company," retorted Kitty. "So you may go with quite an easy mind."

"Thanks awfully," replied Alice, with a sneer. Her momentary good nature had dried up like th dew. She put on her hat, wrapped a shawl round her shoulders and left the room.

Kitty returned to her place by the window. It was now between eight and nine o'clock. She had refused both dinner and tea, and was in consequence feeling weak and faint. There was a giddy sensation in her head to which she was not accustomed. She did not connect it with the fact that she was starving, and wondered what was the matter with her. She was too excited and wretched to feel her ordinary appetite. She had gone through a great deal, and her nerves were reminding her of the cruel trick she was playing on them. It was very dull in her room; the gas jet shed a hideous glare over the place. The room in itself was by no means pretty, for the paper was the worse for wear, and the paint was nearly worn through to the woodwork. The hangings to the windows and to the two little beds were of an ugly drab color; and the view out of these windows only revealed a narrow street. At Kitty's own home she had a bedroom in the Castle end; the paper hung in ribbons, the door was draughty, the bedstead rickety and old; but what a view there was from the windows! A view of Lake Coulin and the mountains in the distance, and the park lying verdant and green between the lake and the house. What a breeze blew in at those windows!

"Oh, I should never be dull if I were locked up in the dear old bedroom at home," thought the girl. "But here! here it is enough to madden one; and yet I must stay here, for I cannot talk to the others. I will not allow Fred to guess my secret. Oh, what a miserable, unhappy, wretched girl I am! I am a prisoner. Oh, if only Laurie saw me! Dear Laurie; the darling, the treasure that he is! It would break his heart if he knew what I am suffering."

There were no books at all interesting to Kitty in the

room, so she could not while away the lagging hours with a novel. As a rule the arranging of her wardrobe, the trying on of her many dresses, gave her pleasant occupation; but she was in no humor to make herself smart that evening.

"I suppose the love of dress is a sin," she said to herself; "although it is one of the rules of the Tug-of-war Society that the girls are to be fashionably dressed. Anyhow, it seems to have been my undoing, for if I had only gone out in sombre ugly attire last night I might have the money now for my darling Laurie; and this heavy, heavy weight would be off my mind, and I should not be in disgrace at Middleton School—not that that much matters."

She went to the window, flung it open, and looked out. It was a clear, starlit night. She could see the sky from between the long rows of houses. She looked up at it, and then put in her head again.

"I shall suffocate if I stay any longer in this room," she said to herself. "After all, why should I obey Miss Sherrard? She spoke about my word of honor; but I have not given it. I was silent—I was silent on purpose. If I could only see Elma and get my money back all would be right, and I could really bear the rest of this terrible week. I have a great mind to risk it and go to her."

No sooner had the thought entered the head of the wayward girl than she proceeded to act upon it. She put on a long cloak which reached nearly to her feet, a little cap of blue cloth was secured over her mass of curling hair, and then going cautiously across the room, she took the key out of the lock, unfastened the door, shut it behind her, locked it from the outside, put the key in her pocket, and ran down-stairs.

"If the servants or Alice come up they will think I have gone to bed. What fun if I keep Alice out of her bed for an hour or two!" laughed Kitty. She was now once more in high excitement and pleasure. It never took long to raise her volatile spirits. "I hope Fred won't be about. I don't want to get the poor darling into mischief," she said to herself. There was no one in sight, however. The younger children were away in another part of the house, Mr. and Mrs. Denvers were out, the servants were in the kitchen, Alice was with Bessie Challoner, and Fred was down in his shed mourning the absence of Kitty, whose bright ways were fascinating him more and more.

"It's all right," thought the girl. She left the house, and a few moments later was walking at a rapid pace in the direction of Constantine Road. The thought of her disobedience, of the daring of her own act, but added zest and pleasure to her walk.

"How happy I shall be when I get the money," she said to herself. "I'll coax Fred or Mrs. Denvers to get me a postal order to-morrow, and I'll send it to Laurie at once. Oh,

what a weight will be off my mind! Why, I'll almost feel inclined to turn good again!"

The walk to Constantine Road was a long one, and Kitty on this occasion was determined to avoid the neighborhood of the "Spotted Leopard." In preference she took the short cut across the common. It was very lonely here, but she had no fear of ghosts or bogies. She walked with her upright, young carriage, her quick, alert, dancing step. It was ten o'clock however, before she reached Constantine Road. She ran up the steps of No. 14, and rang the bell. The door was opened to her by the servant, Maggie.

"Oh, Miss Malone," cried that young woman, "is that yourself, miss? I has got into the most terrible trouble."

Maggie's face was flushed and blistered with crying.

"They has took away my wiolets, miss, and I call it a bitter, cruel shame."

"Never mind that now, Maggie," answered Kitty. "I want to see Miss Elma. Is she in?"

"That she is, miss, and she can't escape you this time. Come right into the parlor, and I'll send her down to you."

Kitty danced into the house. As far as her appearance now went she had never known a sorrow nor a care in her life. She stood in the center of the room, waiting impatiently for Elma to appear.

Maggie having shut her in, went cautiously upstairs. Elma and Carrie were in their bedroom, Carrie was already in bed.

Maggie, who seemed to scent mischief all round, thought she would now act with considerable guile. She knocked a low and gentle knock on the panel of the door. Elma came to open it.

"What is it, Maggie?"

"Miss Helma, will you come outside on the landing for a minute?"

Elma went out.

"I have a bit of news about that money, miss. If you'll come right down to the dining-room I'll tell you there."

"News about my money, Maggie? Oh, impossible!" But hope, ever ready to dawn in the human breast, could not help rising now on poor Elma's horizon. It all seemed utterly impossible; but what earthly sense would there be in Maggie telling a lie.

"I was just getting into bed," she said. "Can't you tell me here?"

"No, miss, it's not me at all; it's news of the money you'll get if you just come down to the dining-room, and be quick about it."

"Well, I may as well go. Is there anybody there?"

"You go and find out, miss."

"Oh!" thought Elma, "Sam Raynes has repented. He was able to find money after all, and has brought it to me. This is nice."

"What's the matter, Elma?" called Carrie from her bed.

"Nothing, Carrie. I'll be back in a few moments."

Elma hastily refastened her dress; put up her hands to her hair to smooth it, and tripped down-stairs full of expectation and hope. Maggie had relit the gas in the dining-room. Elma bounded into the room.

"Well, Sam," she exclaimed. Then she stepped back a couple of paces; she was confronted not by Sam, but by Kitty Malone herself.

"Kitty!" cried Elma. There was a faintness in her voice, which Kitty had no time to remark.

"Yes, Elma, I have come. I have broken my word of honor; but after all, I never really gave it. I dare say I shall get into a worse scrape than ever; but I can't help it. I came to you, Elma, because I *must* have that money. Will you let me have it now at once please—my eight sovereigns—will you give them to me now? If I had seen you last night I should not have been so miserable. I was coming to you when Fred and I passed the 'Spotted Leopard.' Oh, please, Elma, give me my money at once!"

Elma's face could scarcely turn whiter. She looked piteously at Kitty.

"I wish I could give it to you," she began; "but——"

"What do you mean; can't you let me have my own money? You have not spent it, not all of it, have you?"

"Yes, I—I spent it."

"You spent all that money! all those eight sovereigns? Oh, Elma you must be joking. Can't you let me have some of it back? Please, Elma, don't say no. It is for Laurie; he is in the most awful trouble. I must have the money, and at once."

"I can't give it to you," said Elma. "I am awfully sorry. Sit down, please, Kitty. Oh, Kitty, you won't tell on me?"

"I don't know what I'll do," said Kitty. "I am nearly distracted."

"But you promised you would not tell. You don't know what an awful scrape I shall get into if you do. And you—oh, yes—you shall have the money soon."

"What do you mean by soon; to-morrow? Shall I have it to-morrow?"

"Not quite so soon as that. Give me a week, Kitty."

"I can't," answered Kitty. "It is a case of life or death to Laurie. Your mother must give it to me if you cannot; but have it I must."

"But you are rich; surely you can manage without it for one week."

"It is not that, and I am unable to explain. Laurie must have the money. He wants me to help him about something, and I must send it to him to-morrow."

"I wish I could give it to you," said Elma. "I would do anything in all the world to let you have it back; but it isn't my fault."

"What did you spend it on? Dress?"

"Oh, in different ways." Elma had made up her mind not to tell about Carrie and Sam Raynes.

"I'll let her think that I spent the money on finery," she said to herself. "She is sympathizing about dress. I'll let her think that."

Kitty's hands had dropped to her sides; a look of despair filled her face.

"What is to be done?" she said. "I never thought for a moment you could not let me have it back."

"You shall have it in a week; that I promise you faithfully."

"But a week will be no good, Elma. Oh! Elma, Elma, Laurie will suffer for this. They will take his freedom from him; he will be like a chained lion; he will lose his spirit; perhaps he will die. I cannot stand it, Elma, I cannot."

Kitty covered her face with both her hands, and the tears which with difficulty she had been keeping back all the evening burst forth in torrents. Kitty did not cry as an English girl might. She cried with the wild, passionate sobs of those who have seldom exercised self-control. Elma was dreadfully frightened.

"Do stop, Kitty," she said. "You make so much noise; mother and Carrie will hear you. Carrie will come down."

"What if she does?" cried Kitty. "Oh, Laurie, Laurie! this will break your heart. You are ruined; ruined for life!"

"There are more than Laurie ruined for life, it seems to me," said Elma. "Kitty, I am ever so sorry; but if you will only be patient I will try and think of some plan of helping you. Now, please, please, promise me one thing—you won't tell that I asked you for this money?"

"Why not? I must tell some one. I must get the money somehow."

"But you made me a promise you would not tell. It is very wrong to break a promise."

"I don't care whether it is right or wrong. I cannot keep this secret, Elma. I must remember Laurie. Perhaps Mr. Denvers will lend me the money. I must think of Laurie first."

"Please, Kitty, listen to me. If you will promise to keep my secret I'll manage to get you the money somehow."

"But how, Elma?"

"Oh, I'll think out some plan. Do you promise me that you'll keep my secret. It would be my ruin if it were known. Do promise, Kitty; do, please."

"I cannot," said Kitty. She walked restlessly to the door. "I must go," she said; "If I don't they will discover that I am out."

"And if they do you'll get into an awful scrape."

"Oh, it doesn't matter; I can't be worse off than I am. My

one hope now is that they will expel me; then I'll have to return to Ireland; and perhaps I may coax father not to be too hard on Laurie."

"Then Kitty, you have quite made up your mind to tell all about me?"

"I think so. I cannot imagine why it matters."

"But it does, and I must give you the reason. I did wrong, dreadfully wrong, ever to ask you for that money. I broke one of the strictest rules of the school."

"What do you mean?"

"It is one of the strictest rules of Middleton School that no schoolgirl must ask another to lend her money. The governors are terribly particular. If it is ever known I shall be most likely expelled. Anyhow, my character will be gone, and I shall be ruined for life. Oh, Kitty, you have not such a hard life as I have. Do have pity on me."

Kitty stood silent; she was thinking deeply.

"You'll promise; won't you?" repeated Elma.

"I can't say. I scarcely know what I am doing at the present moment."

"Then listen to me. If you tell about the money I'll tell about this visit. There; don't you see now we are quits."

"You tell! That would be mean of you."

"Yes. I'll tell that you broke your parole."

"But I never gave it."

"Oh, that is only begging the question, Kitty. Miss Sherrard understood that you had given it. When you came here you broke it. You'll get into a terrible scrape."

"And you spoke to me, Elma; so you, too, will get into a scrape."

Kitty's tears stopped like summer rain, and a flash of sunshine flew across her charming face.

"Poor Elma, you will be in hot water too," she said. "What a muddle everything is in."

"You see, Kitty, we must cling together, for we are both in the same boat. I'll do my utmost to get you that money. I am sure I can manage somehow. But you must not tell."

"All right. I'll keep the secret until after school to-morrow. Good-by, Elma."

She left the house, and Elma returned to Carrie.

"Who were you talking to all that time?" exclaimed Carrie.

"That unfortunate girl, Kitty Malone."

"You mean to say she was here?"

"Yes; she came about the money. I am miserable about it. I promised to get it for her by hook or by crook. How can I manage?"

"Look here," said Carrie after a pause, during which she was sitting up in bed and thinking intently. "You say that Kitty Malone is very rich?"

"Yes, of course she is. She has more money than she knows what to do with. Why, I tell you, Carrie, the day

she lent me those eight sovereigns I saw fifteen in her purse. Fancy a girl having fifteen sovereigns just to do what she liked with? I could scarcely realize it. I took the money before I knew what I was doing. She did tempt me so sorely when she showed me her purse."

"Oh, I'm not a bit surprised," said Carrie. "If I had been in your shoes I'd have taken the whole fifteen sovereigns just as soon as the eight. But listen to me, Elma; I have a plan in my head. I'll talk it over with Sam to-morrow; perhaps we can get the money; but there's no saying. I'll talk it over with Sam."

"I wish you would not. I would rather not get it through his means."

"What a dislike you have to him."

"I have. He is not good enough for you, Carrie. Oh, Carrie, dear, I vow and declare that I'll work for you and mother; I'll work my very fingers to the bone; I'll do anything for you. Only don't marry that horrid fellow."

"How excitable you are, Elma, and queer. Sam suits me very well. Oh, if you don't want his help you need not have it—remember it is your scrape, not mine."

"It is your scrape, too, Carrie. You stole the money and gave it to Sam Rayner. You are a thief, and you have ruined your sister."

"If you begin abusing me I shall certainly not stay awake any longer," said Carrie; "I'm dead with sleep as it is. Now, do put out the candle, like a good girl. I'm off to the Land of Nod."

Carrie pulled the clothes over her head and struggled down among the pillows. Elma stood and stared out of the window.

"I wonder if I could do it," she said at last to herself. "It might be the best plan; and Gwin is very kind and very rich. I wonder if I dare. Anything seems better than my present predicament."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I CANNOT HELP YOU."

ELMA scarcely slept that night. At an early hour on the following brilliant summer's morning she stole softly out of bed, glanced for a moment at Carrie, as she lay sleeping the sleep of the just, with her towzled hair tossed about the pillow, and then, getting deftly into her own clothes, left the room without arousing the sleeper. She had made up her mind very definitely what to do. Without even waiting to get any breakfast, she unfastened the hall door, opened it, and stepped out into the full radiance of the summer's morning. A quick walk brought her in a little over half an hour to Harley Grove. When she went up the ponderous flight

of steps which led to the principal door of the mansion a clock far away struck the hour of seven.

"It is terribly early," she said to herself, "terribly early to disturb her; but it is my only chance. I must have time; I cannot rush this thing. If she can help me I believe she will; and anyhow, I do no harm by what I intend to say to her."

Elma rang the bell, but her early summons was not immediately attended to. Presently a servant girl, who looked as if she might be one of the under-housemaids, unbolted and unbarred the door, and opened it a few inches. When she saw a neat-looking girl, in all probability a schoolgirl, standing outside she opened it a little further and her jaw dropped in some astonishment.

"I have come here," said Elma, "to know if I can see Miss Harley immediately on very special business."

"I don't know, miss, I am sure," answered the girl, who was a stranger in those parts. "I can't say that you can see Miss Harley now, for I think she is fast asleep and in bed, miss."

"It is of the utmost importance or I would not disturb her," said Elma. "I have brought a note with me; can you manage in some way to have it delivered to her? I can wait down-stairs in any of the rooms until I get her answer."

As Elma spoke she slipped a little three-cornered note into the girl's hand, at the same time placing in it one of her own most valuable and very few and far between shillings.

"Can you manage it for me?" she said. "It is really of the utmost importance."

A shilling was a small bribe; but the housemaid was young and tender-hearted. She looked again once or twice at Elma, who could wear a most pleasing expression when she chose, and then, ushering her into a small room to the left of the wide entrance hall, departed slowly up-stairs on her errand.

While she was away Elma fidgeted, walking from end to end of the little room into which she had been admitted. All depended, or so she imagined, on her note reaching its destination. She knew Gwin's kind heart; she was certain that if Gwin received the note, however tired and sleepy she was, she would at least see her for a few minutes. Elma had worded it craftily.

"I am in great trouble," she had written. "It is connected with Kitty Malone. I see my way to helping Kitty if you, Gwin, can help me. But I must see you now at once. Let me come to your bedroom. I would not disturb you if it were not a matter of life or death."

This note, sufficiently startling in its contents, was given by the under-housemaid to Gwin's own special maid. The girl, after some deliberation said she would venture to give it to Gwin, early as the hour was. Accordingly she stole

into the shaded bedroom, drew up one of the blinds, and when Gwin opened her sleepy eyes presented her with the little three-cornered note on a salver.

"There's a young lady, a Miss Lewis, waiting down-stairs. She brought this note and begged that it should be delivered to you at once, miss. I ventured under the circumstances to wake you, as the young lady seemed from all accounts to be in a desperate way."

"What can it mean?" said Gwin. She sprang up in bed, tore open the note, and read the contents.

"Is my cold bath in the room, Simpson?" she asked of her maid.

"Yes, miss; in your dressing-room."

"Well, I shall dress at once. Go down, please, to Miss Lewis and tell her that I'll be ready to see her in my study in twenty minutes."

The maid departed on this errand, which brought much relief to poor Elma.

In less than the time named she was summoned by Gwin's maid to come with her to Miss Harley's study. There a moment later she and Gwin were clasping each other's hands. Gwin was in a long white dressing-gown; her hair streaming over her shoulders.

"Well, to be sure, Elma," she exclaimed, "you are an early bird. Now, what do you want with me? I am full of curiosity. You are in trouble, and it is something connected with Kitty Malone?"

"Yes," said Elma. "I am desperate, and I have come on a desperate errand, Gwin. Can you manage, somehow or other, in some fashion, to let me have the use of eight pounds for—for say a fortnight?"

Gwin Harley gasped; not only at the magnitude of the sum demanded, but also at Elma's audacity in asking for it.

"You want eight pounds," she exclaimed. "But, Elma, you know the rule?"

"Oh, yes, I know the rule; and it is because I am fairly desperate I apply to you. You might lend the money to my sister Carrie; or perhaps mother would be best. It might be managed so that I didn't appear to borrow it. I would not ask for it if—if the trouble were not terrible; and—and the secret belongs to another."

"What do you mean?"

"It belongs partly to Kitty Malone."

"I cannot help you," said Gwin decidedly.

"Why? Oh, Gwin, I did not know you could be so cruel."

"You don't understand, Elma. I am surprised that you ask me. How could I break one of the strictest rules of the school?"

"Oh, but you need not really break it; I mean it could be managed in this way: Would not your father lend mother the money? You need not do it at all; all you have to do is to ask him."

"You must tell me everything, Elma. This is most mysterious. Why do you want money? Is it for yourself? You must tell me every single thing."

"I cannot tell you, because the secret is not mine."

"You say Kitty is mixed up with this?"

"Yes, yes."

"And you will not tell why?"

"I cannot. I wish I could."

"Then, Elma, I also must be firm. I cannot help you."

"You will not ask your father?"

"How could I? It would be a subterfuge—the whole thing would be a subterfuge. I must have nothing to do with it. I am sorry, Elma, for I see you are in great trouble; but I am powerless."

"Then I am ruined," said Elma. She covered her face with her hands, and the tears trickled slowly between her fingers.

"I wish I could help you," said Gwin kindly. "Is there any other way?"

"No other way. I want eight pounds for a fortnight—I want it desperately. You could manage to let me have it without breaking the rules of the school, but you will not."

"I am truly sorry but—I will not."

"Oh, Gwin, if you would only trust me. We were always friends, were we not?"

"Yes," answered Gwin slowly. "I have always like you, Elma."

"We were friends," continued Elma, wiping the tears passionately from her cheeks; "and I did think last night, when I was in such trouble, that perhaps you could come to my aid. I thought you would trust me without my telling you everything."

"I cannot, Elma," said Gwin again.

"Why?"

Elma now looked steadily into Gwin's face. Gwin looked gravely into hers. After a time Gwin spoke slowly:

"Because," she said—"forgive me, Elma—you are not trustworthy."

"Oh!" said Elma. She turned first pale and then red.

"There in no use in my staying," she said, after a pause. "I am sorry I got you up so early."

"Oh, that does not matter," said Gwin, in an altered tone. "I would do what I could to help you; but I cannot do the impossible."

"I see that I was mistaken in you."

"Not at all," replied Gwin. "You found me what I have always been. I am naturally careful. I never jump to wild conclusions; I am not impulsive. I have liked you, and I shall go on liking you in the future."

"Even though I am not trustworthy?"

"Yes; I shall like you for what you are. You have al-

ways been nice to me, and I wish to be nice to you. Please understand that this will make no difference."

"And you won't tell what I came about?"

"No, I shall never mention it. Now, must you go?"

"I must," said Elma.

The full morning light fell upon her face as she spoke, and Gwin noticed that it looked small, pinched, and thin.

"You must have some breakfast first," she said. She walked across the room and sounded the bell. The servant appeared in a moment.

"Order breakfast to be served here this morning," said Miss Harley, "for two, please." The maid withdrew. Gwin opened the window and looked out.

"I am very sorry for Kitty," she said, after a pause.

Elma did not reply. After a time she said slowly:

"Did you see Miss Sherrard last night?"

"I did; but it was useless. She won't retract her mandate."

A sigh of relief came from Elma's lips.

The servant again appeared with breakfast. Gwin poured out tea for her friend. Elma drank a cup, her throat felt dry. She saw no way out of her difficulty. She could scarcely bring herself to eat.

A few moments later she was on her way back from Harley Grove. She hesitated whether to go straight to the school and wait there until nine o'clock or to return to Constantine Road. After a little reflection she decided on the latter course. She reached home hot and weary between eight and nine o'clock. Carrie was seated at the breakfast table; a letter lay on Elma's plate.

"Why, Elma, what have you been doing out and about at this unearthly hour?" said Carrie, as she cracked the shell of an egg by no means fresh.

"Where is mother?" remarked Elma, as she seated herself at the table.

"She has a bad headache. I have sent up her breakfast. Are you going to see her?"

"No, I think not. I shall just have time to eat something—not that I am specially hungry—and then start for school."

"There's a letter on your plate. Why don't you read it?"

"I know; it's from Aunt Charlotte."

"Well, well, and you are interested in Aunt Charlotte more than I am," said Carrie. "Do read your letter."

Elma somewhat languidly tore open the envelope. The next moment she uttered an exclamation, and her face went first red and then pale.

"Aunt Charlotte writes to say she is coming here to-day."

"To-day! Good gracious!" said Carrie. "She doesn't want me to stay in, does she?"

"Oh, no; but this is terribly awkward."

"Why so, Elma? Why shouldn't you ask her to lend you the money?"

"Ask Aunt Charlotte! I may as well put my hand into the fire."

"Well, suppose I were to help you," said Carrie, after a time.

"You, Carrie; how could you?"

"But suppose I were to—I am not the sort of person who does anything for nothing. What would you give me if I got you out of this?"

"But how could you get me out of it?"

"Why, I suppose by giving Kitty the money."

"Carrie, you talk nonsense. Unless, indeed, you were to persuade Sam Raynes——"

"Oh, it's useless to worry poor Sam. He has speculated with that money, and if he doubles it we shall have it back. I think when that time comes the very least you ought to do, Elma, is to give me half of the balance over and above what you borrowed. That would be three pounds ten, for me quite a nice little sum. It would keep me in ribbons, gloves, and boots for a bit. I get such a very small salary."

"Well, the money has not been doubled; it's time enough to talk of our chickens when they are hatched," said Elma. She rose from her seat, looking despairingly at the open letter which she held in her hand.

"After all, I may as well take this up to mother," she said.

"One moment before you go, Elma. Would you like me to help you, or would you not?"

"If you could help me, Carrie, of course I should be obliged."

"And what is the punishment they have inflicted upon that Irish lass?"

"Oh, dear me, Carrie, I told you all about that yesterday; she is in Coventry—we are none of us allowed to speak to her."

"All the same, you did speak to her last night, don't forget."

"Yes, I could not help myself; but if it was found out it would go hard with us both."

"Then I am the one to interfere," said Carrie *sotto voce*. "I'll do my best, Elma, and trust to you to make it up to me when I have got you out of this scrape."

"I wish you would do something, Carrie; but I don't suppose you can. It's awful to think of Aunt Charlotte coming now. If I can't help Kitty, Kitty is sure to tell, and then it will be all over the school. They won't blame her so much as they'll blame me. Oh dear, dear! if you would do something!"

"Well, I promise that I just will," said Carrie. "Now go off to school with an easy mind."

CHAPTER XIX.

KITTY TELLS THE TRUTH.

EARLY the next morning Kitty received her telegram. It certainly was not at all calculated to suit her. She was restless and miserable before; now her hands shook so violently that she could scarcely eat her breakfast.

Alice acted somewhat the part of a jailer; she had to convey the disgraced girl to Middleton School.

"I am ill; I won't go," said Kitty, bursting into tears.

"You had much better come, Kitty," said Alice, speaking almost kindly for the first time in her life; she really pitied poor Kitty at that moment. "If you will only take your punishment patiently it will soon be over, and I know for a fact," she continued, "that many of the girls are only too anxious to make it up to you by and by."

"Oh, it's not that," said Kitty; "it is because I am so wretched. I have a great trouble at home; but there, there's no use in talking to you about it, Alice."

"So you always say," answered Alice. "Whenever I want to be the least bit good to you, you put me off; but never mind, I am sure I can do without your friendship. Anyhow, I think you must come to school unless you are so ill that mother will be obliged to send for the doctor."

"Oh, I don't want that," said Kitty, "I never had a doctor in my life. If you'll wait for me, Alice I'll go up-stairs and put on my hat."

"She rushed to her room, flung herself on her knees for a moment by her bedside, and uttered a frantic prayer to Heaven.

"Oh! God, in your mercy, keep Laurie from doing anything desperate," cried the unhappy girl. She then joined Alice down-stairs. Her face was white; there were heavy black lines under her eyes; she had never looked prettier, more pathetic, more likely to win sympathy from the other girls.

At prayers that morning all eyes were directed to Kitty Malone. She was not allowed to sit with the others, but was given a place on the bench with the teachers. Here she faced the rest of the school. It would have been a cruel position for another girl; but it did not matter to Kitty, for she saw no one present. Her eyes, with that queer inward look in them were gazing straight, not at the scene before her, but at the old home in Ireland. The squire, whom she so passionately loved, roused to the last extremity of anger; the boy, whose heart was hers, crushed, trapped, imprisoned, his liberty taken from him. Kitty trembled from head to foot; she could scarcely restrain her terrible emotion.

After school she accompanied the others to the class-room, but in absolute silence. She was given her usual lessons to do, but at a table by herself. Her punishment was to be

carried out in all its fulness; but, dreadful as it would seem to most, it did not touch her at all to-day. Her head ached, her eyes felt dim. Laurie's telegram, which lay in her pocket, seemed to scorch into the very depths of her heart. She had not even been allowed to answer it; the whole weight of her trouble lay unrelieved upon her. The poor child was unaccustomed to such anguish, and her self-control was in danger moment by moment of giving way.

As she strove to get that dull piece of English history into her head, as she endeavored to follow the rules of syntax, as the knowledge that she never, never to the longest day of her life, would understand what was meant by the possessive case, alongside with these feeble little efforts to follow her lessons, ran the dark thought of how, by what possible means, she could help Laurie. And more and more as the time went on she felt that she could not keep her promise to Elma. Elma had been cruel to her; she had borrowed her money when she knew she had not the most remote chance of paying it back; she had spent it according to her own saying in the most frivolous way. Now, for the first time, Kitty learned to despise dress. How could Elma spend the money which was to save Laurie in anything so contemptible as ribbons and finery? Kitty looked down at her own neatly-appointed clothes; her perfect little shoes peeped out from beneath the frill of her dress. Notwithstanding her misery she was as neat as usual in her attire; but now she had no heart to appreciate gay clothes, good looks, pretty ribbons—any of the things which usually delighted her. Laurie seemed to cry to her; she fancied she could hear his voice coming across the waters to her ears—Laurie, who had always trusted to her, who, strong as he was, was not quite so strong as Kitty when scrapes and troubles were about. Oh! if only she could go to him! If only she might relieve her feelings and tell the exact truth to Miss Sherrard! What kept her back? Nothing whatever but the thought of Elma. She had given Elma a promise, and, tempted as she was, she must not break it.

As this thought came to her she remembered that she had only promised Elma to keep the secret until after morning school. That time would soon be up.

"Once Miss Sherrard knows I am certain she will help me," thought Kitty, "though I don't want to excuse myself; yet I know that a great deal of the blame of my proceedings will be lifted from my shoulders to Elma's. Why should I go through all the suffering, and Elma sit there looking so calm, and quiet, and still?"

As these thoughts rushed through Kitty's mind she glanced up for the first time, and calmly surveyed the great room full of her fellow-students. As if with one impulse all the girls raised their eyes and looked back at her. There was pity on most of the faces, amusement on a few, curiosity on a few others; but on Elma's face alone was an expression of intense

anxiety and misery. Kitty had the kindest heart in the world. The moment she saw this expression the idea of betraying Elma melted from her mind.

"She does look wretched," she said to herself. "I must not speak to her; I dare not, and yet—yet—I should like her to know that I am not going to be hard on her."

Kitty tore off a piece of her exercise book and managed, when she thought no one would see, to write a little note to Elma. In this she said, "Don't be afraid, Elma; I have made up my mind not to tell."

This note she twisted up, and, as the girls were going to the playground for recess, managed to flash an intelligent glance toward Elma. Elma approached close to her table, Kitty stretched out her hand, and Elma's fingers were just about to close over the note, when, by an unlucky chance, there came a breeze through the window, and the note, for some inconceivable reason, fluttered from Kitty's hand to the floor. In an instant Miss Worrick had seen it. She was just stepping forward when Elma like a flash caught it up and tore it into fragments. She would not for the world have the note seen. Miss Worrick, filled with anger, came up to Kitty.

"You are a bad girl, the worst girl I know," she said. "You are not even honorable. Did you not give your parole that you would not hold communication with another girl in the school, and yet you have been trying to communicate with Elma Lewis by means of writing?"

"Writing is not speaking," said Kitty, now standing up very erect and proud, and replying to Miss Worrick as pertly as she could.

"Don't answer me, miss; you grow worse and worse. Elma Lewis, do you know anything about that note?"

Kitty looked full at Elma. If she was going to be true to Elma, would Elma be equally true to her?

"I know nothing about it," said Elma promptly.

Kitty's eyes filled with withering scorn; an expression of disdain curled her pretty lips.

"You are quite certain, Elma? Kitty Malone seems to have a great anxiety to communicate with you. Can you throw any light on the scrape she has got into?"

"I know nothing whatever about her secrets; I—I have nothing to do with them," said Elma in an agitated voice, which she endeavored in vain to render calm.

Gwin Harley, who had stopped on her way out of the class-room, paused to listen to Elma's words.

Kitty's face was now white as death. She did not glance at Elma; she was looking the other way.

"Leave us, girls," said Miss Worrick.

The next moment the great class-room was empty, with the exception of Miss Worrick and Kitty Malone. Kitty was standing upright as a dart.

"Take me to Miss Sherrard; I want to speak to her," she said.

"I am certainly going to take you to her. You are a very, very wicked girl. I doubt not you will be expelled."

"Oh, I hope I shall," said Kitty. "I should like nothing in all the world better."

"You would? You are quite incorrigible. Do you know, you wretched girl, what it means?"

"No," answered Kitty; "I wait for you to tell me. What does it mean, Miss Worrick?"

"That you are tainted for life, disgraced for life. Wherever you go it will be always remembered of you that your conduct was so bad at school that you were obliged to be expelled."

"But that won't matter in old Ireland," said Kitty with a hollow, forced laugh.

"Yes, it will; it will break your father's heart. There are no people so proud as the Irish. They can stand a good deal; but any cloud on their honor——"

"Ah, you are right," cried Kitty, standing still, and a queer change coming over her face. "Our honor—no one ever touched that yet."

"It will have a nice blow when you are dismissed from Middleton School," said Miss Worrick, glad to find a point in Kitty's hitherto invulnerable armor. "Come with me at once, you bad girl. I must explain your conduct to Miss Sherrard."

"I have something on my own account to say to Miss Sherrard," answered Kitty in a proud voice; "something which will explain a good deal."

"I am glad to hear it; but I scarcely think any words of yours can remove the stigma on your character. But come; I have no time to argue with you further."

Miss Worrick now led the way into Miss Sherrard's little sitting-room. Miss Sherrard was standing near the window; she turned quickly when she saw Miss Worrick, and a displeased and withal a troubled glance filled her eyes as they rested upon Kitty.

"Anything fresh?" she said, turning to the teacher with a weary expression in her voice.

"Only just what I expected," said Miss Worrick with bitterness. "Kitty Malone is not to be trusted. Yesterday she gave her word of honor——"

"I didn't," interrupted Kitty.

"Kitty my dear, allow your teacher to speak."

"She gave her word of honor, or equivalent to it, that she would submit to the punishment which you rightly inflicted upon her. Well, I found her just now in the act of smuggling a note into Elma Lewis' hand."

"Oh, but this is very bad, Kitty," said Miss Sherrard. "Did you not know what your word of honor meant?"

"I never promised anything," replied Kitty. "You spoke; but I was silent."

"Pardon me, my dear; that is begging the question. You

were told that you were not to communicate with any of your fellow-pupils. Your silence signified consent. Kitty, I am ashamed of you."

"As you know so much you may as well know all," said Kitty, desperation in her tone. "I did far worse than you think. Last night I went out again after dark by myself to see Elma Lewis. I had an interview with her. I talked to her, and she talked to me. That was not exactly her fault; for I forced her to speak. Now you know how very bad I am. Expel me if you wish. I know you will after this. I am in dreadful disgrace. I only wish I were dead."

"Leave us, Miss Worrick," said Miss Sherrard.

The door was closed behind the governess; and the head-mistress, taking one of Kitty's cold hands, led her to a seat near herself on the sofa.

"There is more behind," she said. "Kitty, you must tell me the truth."

"I long to tell you," answered Kitty. "A short time back I had made up my mind to conceal it because the telling would make another girl miserable—miserable for life. Now, my feelings are changed."

"I am glad that you are at last willing to confide in me," said Miss Sherrard in a kinder tone. "Tell me everything, Kitty, and as quickly as you can."

Thus counseled, Kitty's reserve absolutely gave way. The whole miserable story was quickly revealed: Elma Lewis' request for money; Kitty's generous response; Laurie's passionate and anguished letter; Kitty's desire to help him; her reasons, which had almost driven her mad, for seeking Elma; her desperate resolve at last to go to her late at night; then Elma's passionate beseeching of her to keep the secret; Kitty's promise that she would do so until after morning school that day; then her further resolve, when she saw the look of misery on Elma's face, to keep it altogether even at the cost of breaking Laurie's heart; then Elma's conduct when the note was discovered.

"I scorn her now," said Kitty. "I don't regard any promise I ever made to her. I am glad to tell. She is false, cowardly, and I scorn her. Miss Sherrard, you know everything; expel me if you must."

"Yes, I know everything," replied Miss Sherrard. She sat still for a few moments, lost in anxious thought. She blamed Kitty still, but she also deeply pitied her. Her feelings toward Elma were so strong that she could scarcely trust herself to speak of them at the present moment.

"My honor is gone, and my heart is broken," continued Kitty. "Of course you will expel me after this; and, indeed, I want to go home. Please, Miss Sherrard, let me go home; I cannot stay any longer at school."

"My dear Kitty," said Miss Sherrard. "I am very sorry for you. I am certainly glad at last to know the truth. You, poor child, have been more sinned against than sinning. I

cannot tell you what I think about Elma. Such a girl does more mischief in a school than twenty like you. Stay, my dear; stop crying. Kitty, Kitty, what is it?"

"I feel nearly mad—Laurie is in such trouble. May I not at least answer his telegram?"

"Yes, here is a telegraph form. Fill in what you like; I will send it at once to the post-office."

"Miss Sherrard, would it be possible for you to lend me the money?"

Miss Sherrard shook her head.

"I could not do it, Kitty; nor would it be right. Your brother has done distinctly wrong; and if you telegraph to him now I hope you will counsel him to go straight to your father and confess everything. There is never the least use in concealment where wrong-doing is concerned, my dear."

But Kitty's eyes had now blazed again with renewed passion.

"You are not a Malone nor an Irishwoman," she cried. "You do not know Ireland, or you would not speak in that tone. I counsel Laurie to tell father what he did to poor Paddy Wheel-about! I counsel him to say that he took the old man's coat—stole it from him! Miss Sherrard, you don't know father. Laurie did it, it is true, in a fit of bravado; but father would never understand. He would be furious, wild; he would punish him severely. Oh, I must get that money somehow, in some fashion!"

"Kitty, you are speaking disrespectfully," said Miss Sherrard, "and I cannot allow it. I am sorry for you, my dear; you are dreadfully overcome at present. Go home now; I will see you again in the afternoon."

Poor Kitty left the room without even biding her teacher good-by.

CHAPTER XX.

AN EYE-OPENER.

In her own room the miserable child fell on her knees, and gave way to a burst of passionate weeping. She cried as she had never cried in the whole course of her life before; her tears seemed as though they could not cease. She was so exhausted at last that, kneeling by her little bed, she fell into a sound sleep. In her sleep she dreamed that she was home again; but all was confusion, worry, distress. Laurie was going to a school in England; Laurie's heart was broken. Old Paddy Wheel-about was dead; the squire was so upset and so angry that he would not even allow Kitty herself to comfort him. Aunt Honora was grumbling and going from room to room in the old Castle. Aunt Bridget was talking about dress, and scolding Kitty with regard to the state of her

wardrobe. Kitty's head ached, and she felt a sense of irritation.

"And it's so pretty," said Aunt Honora. "Those ruffles round the skirt are done in such a dainty manner, and—oh, I won't disturb you if you'll allow me just to take the pattern. I can in a moment—don't move, don't move!"

Kitty opened her eyes in some bewilderment, and gazed full into the fat and somewhat red face of Carrie Lewis. It was Carrie's voice she had heard, piercing through her dreams. It was Carrie who was bending by her side and holding up a length of her skirt in her hand.

"Oh, don't move, pray; I have just got the set of it; it's very curious and very fashionable. I know Sam would like it awfully."

"Who are you, and what do you want?" said Kitty, jumping to her feet and confronting her unwelcome visitor with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"I knocked at your door several times, and you didn't answer," said Carrie; "so then I opened it softly and came in, and you were half-sitting, half-kneeling by your bed, sound asleep; and your skirt did look so very fashionable that I was tempted!—oh yes, I have taken the pattern in my mind's eye. I'll alter my blue nun's-veiling. I can easily get a bit more of the stuff to match, and it will make it quite *comme il faut*."

"But who are you?" said Kitty, who had never laid eyes on Carrie before.

"I'm Elma's sister. Now you know."

"Elma's sister?" said Kitty. "But what have you come to my room for? What do you want here?"

"To speak to you. I want to help you if you'll let me."

"To help me?" said Kitty languidly. "I would much rather you went away. You cannot help me; you know nothing whatever about me. I am in great, great trouble, and I would much rather be alone."

"You would not rather be alone if you could be helped," said Carrie. "I know all about it. You have got a brother in Ireland who has got into a scrape. Bless you, I know all about the scrapes of young men. Now, poor Sam Raynes, he—Yes, what is it, Miss Malone?"

"I wish you would leave me," said Kitty in a haughty tone. "I am not friends with Elma just now, and I would rather not see any of her family."

"Yes, but I think you'll see me when I tell you my errand," said Carrie, in no way abashed by Kitty's manner. She crossed the room as she spoke, and deliberately placing herself in the one easy-chair the room possessed crossed her legs, and leaning back, looked fixedly at Kitty.

"Very well, if you won't go, then I must," said Kitty. "I don't understand English people. They talk a great deal about manners; but no Irishwoman, none that I ever heard of, would dream——"

"Oh, bosh! stop all that," said Carrie in her rudest voice. "I have come here to help you, and I see that I must explain myself. You want some money, don't you?"

"Yes; but I cannot get it," answered Kitty.

"Oh, my dear, do just stay still a moment. What a sweet little shoe! Did you get it at any shop here?"

"No," answered Kitty, interested for the moment in spite of herself. "Aunt Honora bought these in Grafton Street, Dublin. They have the nicest shoes in that special shop of any place I know. Do you like it?"

"Oh, it is quite sweet; it is the way the heel is arranged, and that little buckle."

"Well, never mind about my shoes now," said Kitty, pushing the attractive little foot well in under her skirt. "What is it you have come to say? Please say it, and then—go."

"I will, if you wish me to. Look here, I know all about your story. You are in dreadful trouble, and so is Elma; but I do declare I think poor Elma's trouble much worse than yours."

"You know nothing about it," cried Kitty, with passion. "Elma in worse trouble! Oh, if you only could guess!"

"I guess well enough," said Carrie, "and so does Elma. You want money, which, evidently, as a rule, is as plentiful to you as blackberries on the hedges in September; and you think, because you cannot lay your hand on that money immediately, the whole world is going to change. But let me tell you that Elma and I want money far, far more badly than you have any idea of. Until you gave Elma that eight pounds, we neither of us ever in our lives had so much in our possession."

"I didn't give it—you make a mistake—I lent it."

"Oh, it is all the same. Elma had it, and, for practical purposes, it was just as valuable as if it were really her own."

"Well, I want her to give it back to me now. I surely have a right to ask for my own money back again?"

"No, you have not—not without reasonable notice. She asked you to lend her some money—she never asked far eight pounds—you let her take it. You said she might have as much as she liked. When she explained the position of things to me, I said: 'Elma, you were a rare fool not to take the whole fifteen.'"

"You must be a very queer girl," said Kitty, astonished at this remarkable specimen of young ladyhood.

"Am I? I don't know. I am frank, and I am generally hard-up. I know, if any one does, where the shoe pinches. Bless you! it would do you good to open your eyes. You don't know what poverty means—a little house, a disgusting little house, shabby paper, dirty ceilings, badly-carpeted floors, the drains wrong, the water-supply as likely to poison us as not, an invalid mother——"

"Oh, have you a mother? Then, I am sure you are not to be pitied," interrupted Kitty.

"Little you know! What good is a mother who is in bed most of the day, a father who— Well, I need not mention him; he is not in the country at any rate. No education to speak of; no dress worth considering; toil, toil from morning till night; and life a mere scramble, a scramble for bread without butter. That's what our life is!"

Kitty had ceased to fidget; she even sank down on the corner of the nearest chair. Her pretty figure, her beautifully-appointed dress, her whole appearance, from the crown of her head to the sole of her foot, betokened what the other girl could never aspire to, never hope to have—abundance of money. And yet at the present moment Kitty was breaking her heart for want of money. No wonder Carrie was puzzled. Kitty's own eyes were opened to an extent they had never been opened before.

"Yes, our life is a rough one," continued Carrie; "very rough indeed; but I don't grumble. I was brought up to it, and use is half the battle, as perhaps you don't know, but you ought. You'll get accustomed to doing without your eight pounds after a bit, and never give it another thought."

"Oh, no, that I won't," said Kitty, now jumping to her feet in her indignation; "and it is not for myself, it is for——"

"Oh, never mind who it is for. You want it, and you think the world is going to stand still because you cannot get it. Well, the world won't stand still. I, who am quite used to doing without money, can assure you as to the truth of that fact. Would you like to know, now, how I spend my days? I teach some horrid children in a small private school from ten to one each morning, and then in the afternoon I go to a family and teach some more little brats; and I am scarcely paid anything for all this toil—starvation wages I call it—and I hate it, hate it. But I have my consolations. I am not over-particular; very small pleasures content me; and there's a fellow whom I love."

"A fellow whom you love?" echoed Kitty; "is it a brother?"

"Bless you, I'm not likely to put myself out about a brother; not that I have one, and so much the better, thank goodness. There's a man whom I love, and a right jolly fellow he is—his name is Sam Raynes. He is not one of your fine, bread-and-butter gentlemen—not he. He is rough and ready, and he has his joke, and he isn't too handsome, although some people admire red hair; but, anyhow, I'm fond of him and he's fond of me, and some day—I don't know when—when we can scrape enough together, we are going to set up housekeeping."

"You are going to marry; is that it?" said Kitty.

"Yes; some day we'll marry. Now, you see, that's a bit of fun for me; and I can go out with Sam on bank holidays and on Sunday afternoons just like any other girl with her young man. Bless you, I don't mind."

"I wonder what all this is leading up to," said Kitty with

a slight yawn. "Of course, it is very interesting to you; but I don't care about your young man."

"No more you do, you haughty little minx; and I wouldn't bother you about him, for, with all his faults, he's too good to have words wasted about him to a little independent chit of a thing like you. But, as I was saying, I'm not talking for nothing. I'm leading up to something. Now, I am content enough with our lot; but Elma isn't. Elma is quite different from me—she has got a great deal of refinement about her."

"Has she indeed?" said Kitty in a voice of scorn.

"Yes, she has, and you needn't contradict me. She's a very clever girl, is Elma. I don't say that she's always as straight as a die—I don't pretend that she is; but she is a clever girl, and she is fond of her books, and she's likely to get on—that is, if you don't spike her guns."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, well, it's only an expression of mine. I heard Sam use it last week. I often copy his phrases, they're so fine and full of flourish. Well, now, if you don't spoil sport, Elma will get into an altogether different circle from your humble servant. Mother and I will go one way, and Elma another. Elma, with her grand notions and her set-you-up sort of airs, will rise in life. She's heartily welcome to go her own way, and I wish her Godspeed, for she is the only sister I have got."

"I don't understand," interrupted Kitty.

"If you'll let me speak I'll soon explain. You don't suppose that girls such as I am are often to be seen at Middleton School?"

"Well, I have not seen any like you," said Kitty, gazing from head to foot at her very peculiar visitor.

"No more you have, bless you; and I'm not the least offended by your very frank stare. Sam admires me, and that's enough for me. Now, Elma looks a lady, doesn't she?"

"I suppose so," said Kitty in a dubious tone.

"You suppose so indeed! Let me tell you that Elma is a born little lady, a real lady, and she looks it, every inch of her. That is why she goes to Middleton School; but now, who do you think pays for her?"

"How can I tell?"

"Do you think mother, or father, or I? Now, who do you think does? I should be interested to know your thoughts."

"I cannot really tell you, Miss Lewis."

"Oh, it does sound fine to hear you Miss Lewising me. My name is Carrie."

"I prefer to call you Miss Lewis."

"Highty! tighty! we are haughty. Well, now, the person who pays for Elma is our Aunt Charlotte—a certain Mrs. Steward, wife of the Reverend John Steward, rector of St. Bartholomew's, Buckinghamshire. There's a grand enough name for you; and I suppose, being a clergyman, you'll con-

sider that he is a gentleman and that his wife is a lady. Aunt Charlotte happens to be own sister to mother; and when Elma made her little complaint to her she took pity on her; and now she pays all her expenses at Middleton School. And if Elma does well and nothing disagreeable comes to Aunt Charlotte's ears, she will send her presently to Newnham or Girton. Think of that! Elma will be a college girl; she will be an undergraduate of one of the universities—and some day a graduate; and then she will get a first-class post as high-school mistress, or mistress of something or other. But if you tell on her and make things bad and the truth gets out— You look pale; are you ill?"

"I am all right," said Kitty. She staggered across the room and poured some water into a glass.

"I did not eat much lunch," she continued; "and I am— Never mind; go on."

"Well," continued Carrie, "if nothing comes to Aunt Charlotte's ears to turn her mind the other way, Elma will be all right; she will move in your sphere—yes, she will, whether you like it or not. She is just so clever she is able to do anything. So I have come to say that I hope to goodness you won't split on her, for it would be mighty cruel of you. You would ruin her for life, and that would be a nice consolation for you when you came to die. She did not steal your money, remember; you gave it to her."

"I lent it to her."

"Oh, how you will harp upon that! But you didn't tell her to a day when she was to pay it back again."

"No, I certainly did not; but, of course, I expected that she would return it to me when I asked for it; and then she spent it on dress."

"Spent it on dress? What do you mean?"

"She told me so."

"Oh, naughty, naughty little Elma!" said Carrie, shaking her forefinger in a very knowing manner. "She didn't like to tell about Sam, and so she made up that story, did she? Well, it was an untruth. She didn't spend that money on dress; she—well, I will tell you—I stole it from her."

"You!" gasped Kitty, backing away in horror.

"Yes. Good gracious! how scared you are! You don't understand the larks of girls like me. I didn't mean any harm. I took it and gave it to Sam to keep for her."

"Then," said Kitty, coming close up to Carrie, her lips parted, the color flooding her cheeks, her eyes full of light, "then, of course, you, Carrie——"

"Oh, I'm Carrie now, am I?"

"Yes, you are; but never mind. Then, you, Carrie, can get it back for me?"

"So I will, all in good time, my pretty little dear. You shall have the money if you are willing to wait, say a month."

"There's no use at all in that," said Kitty, her voice sounding faint and far away.

"I am afraid there must be, as far as that eight pounds is concerned. The fact is, Sam is speculating with the money, and when we get it back it will be doubled. Elma and I will divide the profits between us, and you shall have your eight pounds back. Now, I think I have told you everything except——"

"And, having told me, I wish you would go away," said Kitty. "I don't know that you have bettered matters in any way. Of course I am sorry for Elma; but it is only right that you should know something. It would be well also for Elma to know the truth. I told her yesterday when I went to your house that I would keep her secret until after morning school."

"Good gracious! You have not blurted out the truth?"

"Wait till you hear. When I was at school this morning I was—oh so miserable! I could not help thinking of— But never mind; you would not understand."

"No, no, of course not; pray proceed."

"I was thinking how soon I might tell."

"Nice sort of creature you are!"

"Why will you interrupt me?" said Kitty. "But then I looked at Elma, and I saw that she seemed very anxious and miserable; and wretched as I was, I made up my mind to be kind to her. I said to myself I will keep her secret; and— and I wrote her a note to tell her so. You would not understand if I said any more; but—but immediately after morning school she—she was false to me; utterly false. You ask her when you see her how she received that letter I wrote to her at the risk of getting into terrible trouble myself. I have been angry, furious, beside myself; and now Miss Sherrard knows everything."

"You don't mean it?" said Carrie. Her florid face had turned perfectly white. She bit her lip and looked out of the window. After a time she looked back again at Kitty, and said slowly:

"You are very cruel, and you have ruined Elma; but after all it is partly my fault. I ought not to have taken that money. Now, look here, shall I tell you what I really came for to-day?"

"If you would do so quickly and then go."

"You won't be in such a hurry to part from me when you know the truth. Now, then, listen. You want some money; I think I see a way to getting it for you."

"Do you really?"

"Yes, I do; that is, if you on your part will do what I want."

"I will do anything to get the money. I want to send it to Laurie if I can this evening. There's nothing I would not give you."

"I will remember that small promise presently," said Carrie in a frank voice. "But now let me tell you what my plan is. You have a great many clothes, have you not?"

"Yes; but please don't bother me about them now. I was

always fond of pretty dress; but I should not care if I had to wear rags at the present moment if only I might get that eight pounds."

"If them's your sentiments," said Carrie, "you very soon can have your wish."

"What in the world do you mean?"

"Why, this. If you'll just allow me to take the pick of your wardrobe I can take away the things and sell them. I'll soon bring back the eight pounds—yes, and for that matter ten too."

"Sell my clothes?" said Kitty. She stared at the other girl as if she did not believe the evidence of her own senses.

"Yes. Did you never hear of a pawnshop, you dear little wiseacre?"

"A pawnshop! Do you think I would allow my clothes to go to a pawnshop?"

"I know nothing whatever about it; but I make you the proposal. I will transact the business for you if you'll allow me ten per cent. upon it. I can get you the money."

"Oh, Carrie, it seems such a bitter shame," said Kitty. Her face was crimson; she went to the other side of the room, opened the window and put out her head. She wanted the cool air to soothe her scorched cheeks; her heart was thumping in her breast. Had matters indeed come to this, that she, Kitty Malone, was to pawn her pretty dresses, her trinkets, her whatnots! Alas! she could not do it.

"I have often had to do it," said Carrie. "I know just how to manage. If you'll allow me to select the most suitable of your things, I'll bring you back the money in no time."

"You are sure?" said Kitty, beginning to yield.

"Certain—sure—positive. But you must allow me ten per cent."

"I know nothing about percentage; but you may take every scrap that is over after you have got me the eight pounds."

"Very well, that's a liberal offer," said Carrie. "Now, then, I may as well take a look at your clothes."

"Oh, it seems such an awful thing to do," said Kitty. "Are you sure, quite sure, that no one will find it out?"

"Not a bit of it; that is, if you'll be quick and not allow that other girl—Alice, you call her—to come into the room."

"I'll lock the door,' said Kitty. She rushed across the room with new hope, turned the key, and came back again to Carrie.

"I never heard of anything quite so extraordinary in my life," she said. "And you—you call yourself a lady?"

"No, I don't; I call myself a good-natured lump of a girl."

"Well, perhaps you are; but to pawn one's things! Do you mean that I will never see them again?"

"Oh yes; whenever you like to return the money. They'll be kept safe enough for you. If you don't return the money, of course, they belong to the pawnbroker; but you have lots

of time to think of that. Look here, I'll pawn them for a month; that will give you heaps of time to look round."

"So it will," said Kitty. "And are you quite, quite certain that I shall have the money to-night?"

"Oh, yes, if you won't talk so much, only act. Now, then, open your wardrobe."

Kitty unlocked the door of the mahogany wardrobe which she shared with Alice, and Carrie began to pull her choice little garments about.

Kitty went and stood by the window.

"Don't you want to know what I am taking?" said Carrie. "Don't you want to make a selection?"

"No; I'll leave it all to you. I can't bear to see them. Take —take what you want."

"Goodness, what a girl!" thought Carrie to herself. "Here's an opportunity for me."

She made a hasty and very wise selection, choosing the richest dresses, the most stylish jackets, skirts, shoes, ribbons, gloves—clipping the feathers out of the hats and the flowers from the toques—throwing in some of the finest cambric handkerchiefs; and then, taking a sheet of brown paper which she had put into a basket on her arm when she left home, she folded the things into it and fastened her parcel with stout string.

"Here I am," she said; "and this is my parcel. I have looked through your wardrobe; your clothes are neat, fine, some of them gaudy, but all good. I can get from three to four pounds for this lot."

"But why don't you take enough to get the eight pounds?" said Kitty, who had quite made up her mind by this time.

"I could not carry any more. Now, then, open your jewel-case, quick."

"My jewel-case. Oh! I cannot part with my jewels."

"You must, if you want your eight pounds by to-night. I know my pawnbroker. He won't give five pounds for this little parcel. Now then, be quick. Oh, there I see Alice Denvers coming up the road with that other fine young lady, Bessie Challoner. Where's your jewel-case?"

Kitty's face was like a sheet.

"I have not any jewels," she said; "or scarcely any worth mentioning. I didn't bring any jewels with me. But here's my watch; will that do?"

"Do—rather! Why, it's a beauty. Don't say a word to the others; keep your own counsel. Now, then, I'll be off to the pawnshop, and you shall have the money to-night. *Au revoir! au revoir!*"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE LADY FROM BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

MRS. STEWARD was a great contrast to Mrs. Lewis. Mrs. Steward was a tall, thin, rather refined-looking woman.

Mrs. Lewis was fat and dumpy, decidedly untidy in appearance, with a melancholy air and a habit of constantly indulging in low weeping. Mrs. Steward looked as if she had never wept in her life; she sat upright as a dart, her movements were quick, her manners independent; she had a vivacious eyes, a somewhat short nose, thin lips, and a very decided manner.

Mrs. Steward and Mrs. Lewis had a long conversation in the untidy, ugly little parlor, while they waited for Elma to return from school. Maggie had been going in and out, glancing with some apprehension at the lady, and then whisking back to her kitchen to sigh profoundly and mourn for the violets which were no longer in her possession.

"I should like something to eat," said Mrs. Steward to her sister. "I thought I would come to you for lunch, Caroline. Have you got anything in the house—a lamb chop or even cold lamb and salad will do quite nicely."

"My dear Charlotte," said Mrs. Lewis, laying her fat, tremulous hand upon her sister's firm but thin arm, "do you think it likely that we often have lamb chops or even cold lamb and salad for lunch? It is true that since the Australian meat came in we can now and then indulge in a very small joint of lamb for Sundays, but certainly on no other day. Ah, Charlotte, you little know the poverty to which your poor sister is subjected."

"I know all about it," said Mrs. Steward, shaking herself angrily, "and my plain answer to you is this—as you sow you must reap. What else did you expect when you married that fool of a man, James Lewis?"

Mrs. Lewis made a great endeavor to rise from the sofa, she made a further effort to look dignified; but all she could really accomplish was to burst into a fresh wail of low weeping and to murmur under her breath, "Charlotte, you are cruel to me, you are cruel."

"I don't mean to be, my dear; but really, Caroline, you do annoy me. Have you no spunk at all in your composition? Are you still fretting your heart out for that good-for-nothing man?"

"Well, you see, I love him," said the poor wife. "The parting from my dear husband was a terrible trial. I think of him at all hours both day and night. I often have an uncontrollable desire to join him in Australia."

"Pray yield to it," said Mrs. Steward in the calmest of voices, "and when you go, take that great lout of a Caroline with you. She is as like you in appearance as one pea is like another. I am ashamed of you. Now, let us turn to a more congenial topic. Little Elma, I am glad to say, is made of very different stuff."

"Oh, Elma is a good girl," said Mrs. Lewis. At that moment Maggie came into the room.

"Have you ordered your servant to prepare any lunch for me?" said Mrs. Steward.

"Well, really——" Mrs. Lewis looked imploringly and with a vacant eye at Maggie.

"There's the remains of the salt beef, mum," said the small worthy, dropping a bob of a courtesy as she spoke.

"I couldn't touch it," said Mrs. Steward with a shudder. "Have you got a fresh egg in the house?"

"Oh, my dear, nothing of the kind—a fresh egg! Fresh eggs are worth their weight in gold. We have a stale egg, if you don't mind that."

Mrs. Steward indulged in another shudder even more violent than the last.

"My good girl," she said then, "pray get me a cup of tea and some thin toast, and be quick about it. See that the tea is really strong and the cream fresh."

"Cream!" murmured Mrs. Lewis; but Maggie had withdrawn.

"Well, now, that is comfortably settled," said Mrs. Steward, "and I can tell you what really brought me to town—I have come about Elma."

"Indeed, and what about her?"

"I mean to take her from you."

"To take Elma away from me, my own dear child?"

"Oh, now, come, Caroline, don't sicken me with your false sentiment. It is a precious good thing for Elma that she has got an aunt ready and willing to help her. I have just arranged to send her to a first-class German school. Her English, I should say, was fair, and she will be taken as pupil-teacher; she will thus have the advantage of learning German. I heard of this through a great friend of mine, Fräulein Van Brunt. She is going to Germany herself next week, and will take Elma, if you can spare her."

"If I can spare her? But if will break my heart—such a sensible girl as she is," said poor Mrs. Lewis.

"Come, come, Carrie, no more nonsense; when I explain all the advantages you will see for yourself how all-important it is that Elma should go. The school is in the Harz Mountains, a splendid place; magnificent air, and all the rest. If Elma stays there for two years, I will then have her home, and send her to Girton as I promised. I will further arrange that she spends her holidays with me, as I think really——" here Mrs. Steward glanced round the shabby room—"I think that the less she remains with her own family for the present the better."

"I see what you mean. I am beneath my own child."

"Beneath her. Well, it is a painful thing to say; but, as you put it so frankly, I must reply in the affirmative," replied Mrs. Steward. "Ah, who is this now?"

The door was flung open, and Carrie, very red about the face, and with her parcel under her arm, entered room. Her intention was to ask her mother to accompany her to the pawnshop. It had not been the first nor the second nor the third time that the unfortunate lady had been obliged to

pawn her things. Carrie thought that her parent could make a better bargain than she could herself, and she hoped that she would have been in time to transact this little business before the arrival of her aunt. She now gave a start of dismay, and, dropping the parcel, sank down on the nearest chair. As she did so Kitty's watch and chain tumbled out of the front of her dress, where she had very insecurely fastened them. The watch was a lovely one, with an enameled back studded with pearls, and the chain was made of eighteen-carat gold. Owing to a warning glance from Carrie, Mrs. Lewis refrained from saying a word; but Mrs. Steward had no idea of keeping her emotions to herself.

"You, I presume, are Carrie," she said, looking at her nicce. "Come here, Carrie, and speak to your aunt."

Carrie advanced as if she were treading on buttered eggs. She held out one dimpled hand gingerly.

"How do you do, my dear? Allow me to congratulate you on the acquisition of that very lovely little watch and that splendid chain. Now, I am devoured with curiosity to know who has given them to you. Surely not your mother? Surely, Caroline, with all your faults, you have not——"

"Oh, dear me, no," said Mrs. Lewis.

Carrie indulged in a loud laugh.

"Bless us, aunt," she cried, "do you suppose mother can afford to give me these? No, I——" She grew red and turned away.

Mrs. Lewis fidgeted on her seat, and appeared thoroughly uncomfortable.

"I do not wish to pry into your secrets, Caroline," said Mrs. Steward, favoring the untidy and vulgar-looking girl with a glance full of reprehension. "You are at liberty to wear handsome watches and chains made of the best gold if your mother cares to see you with things so unsuitable to your class and appearance. Your doings in life are no affair of mine. But now, as you happen to be my niece, will you have the kindness to go immediately into the kitchen and tell Maggie, or whatever the name of your servant is, to hurry with that tea and toast."

Carrie was only too glad to dart from the room. She picked up her parcel, and resorted to the kitchen.

"Oh, Miss Carrie, I do wish you would help me," said Maggie, who was flying distractedly about. "There's the kitchen fire all but out, and the lady ordered toast as crisp as you please. I don't believe we can do it for her. Wouldn't she be content with thin bread and butter curled in rolls?"

"Oh, of course she would, and must," said Carrie. "She is in no end of a temper, and for my part I don't wish to humor her. Yes, of course, Maggie. I'll cut the bread and butter and make it into rolls, and you see to the tea."

"Thank you, miss, I'm sure I'm much obliged, and perhaps, miss, you wouldn't mind taking it into the dining-

room, for her eyes do fasten on to you that fierce that I get all of a tremble, and as likely as not I'll drop the tray."

Carrie laughed, and being at heart good-natured in her own way, helped Maggie with some vigor to prepare the tea.

At last a meal, which could not be remarked for its abundance, was forthcoming, and was brought into the dining-room.

"I ordered toast," said Mrs. Steward in an angry voice.

"I am sorry, Aunt Charlotte," said Carrie; "but the fire happened to be out in the kitchen. You see," she added, somewhat spitefully, "we are obliged to economize with coals, and we don't keep a fire up in the middle of the day."

"Well, I am really so famished that I am content with anything," said the good lady. "Pour me out a cup of tea at once, my dear, and just put the bread and butter where I can reach it."

Carrie did so, winking at her mother as she arranged the tray. The next moment Mrs. Lewis went out into the passage. Carrie followed her, closing the door behind their guest.

"Mother, I want you to come with me to the Sign of the Three Balls."

"What in the world for, Carrie?"

"I have got to pawn some things, some beautiful things, and I am to get ten per cent. on the commission. I shall turn over a nice little bit of money, and you can have your favorite supper. You will come, won't you, mother? And I'll give you half a crown into the bargain."

"Oh, dear, dear," said Mrs. Lewis, "I wish she had not come! She never helps me in any way. All she does is to scold me and make me more depressed than I am already. And she blames me so for marrying your poor father, Carrie; as if I could help that now. And what do you think she is going to do? She says she is going to take Elma from us."

"And a good thing, too," said Carrie.

"Carrie, what an unnatural girl you are! Do you mean to say you would be glad to part from your sister?"

"I would, because I am fond of her, and she has got into the most awful scrape at school. Don't you put any spoke in her wheel, mother, for goodness' sake!"

At that moment the latchkey was heard in the lock, and Elma herself appeared on the scene.

"Oh, good gracious! Elma," crid Carrie, darting up to her sister, and beginning to whisper vigorously into her ear.

"What?" said Elma, with a start of dismay. "So soon?"

"Yes, yes; she's been here for nearly an hour. She is devouring rolled bread and butter and tea in the dining-room at present. She asked for toast——"

"Yes," interrupted Mrs. Lewis, who now came up and began also to whisper; "yes, and fresh eggs, and cream and lamb chops, and cold lamb and salad. I never heard of anything so unreasonable. My poor head is in an awful whirl.

But she has come about you, Elma. She wants to take you away with her."

"She wants to take me away with her?" exclaimed Elma, starting, and her pale face flushing.

"And you had better go, Elma, and be quick about it," said Carrie, giving her a warning glance.

"I don't know what all this means," said Elma, her heart beating uncomfortably fast; "but I had better go in and see Aunt Charlotte."

"Yes, my love, yes; and while you are talking to her I—What do you say, Carrie—you and I might go out upon that little matter of business, might we not?"

"To be sure, mother; an excellent thought. If you stay here I'll run up-stairs and fetch your bonnet, veil, and mantle in a twinkling. Go in to Aunt Charlotte, Elma; do, for goodness sake, make yourself of use. More depends on it than you think. If she hears us whispering and muttering in the hall she'll be out upon us."

Elma instinctively put up her two hands to smooth back her hair, she straightened her already perfectly neat little jacket, and, drawing herself up to her full *petite* height, entered the little dining-room.

Elma was a perfect contrast to her untidy mother and her frowzy sister. However poorly dressed, she was always the pink of neatness. She was full of agitation now and nervous fear, but not a trace of these emotions could be visible in her manner and appearance. She went up to her Aunt Charlotte, who for her part held out both her arms and, drawing the girl down, printed a kiss upon her cheek.

"I am really glad to see you, Elma," exclaimed Mrs. Steward. "Sit near me, my dear; it is a pity you were not in when I arrived. It was the least you might have done for your aunt, Elma. You had my letter this morning. Oh, my poor child, I have gone through a dreadful hour! These vulgar relations of yours grow worse and worse."

"My mother and sister?" murmured Elma.

"Yes; it is a terrible affliction for you. But, my dear, I am going to relieve you from the strain. I, your aunt, am coming to the rescue. There, Elma, pour me out another cup of tea, and I will tell you everything."

Elma raised the teapot, she filled her aunt's cup with fresh tea, added a little milk, and brought it to her side.

"Thank you, my dear. Now, Elma, you may consider yourself a made girl."

"Made?" echoed Elma, turning her white face to Mrs. Steward.

"Yes, made. What would you say to going abroad?"

Elma's eyes brightened.

"Do you mean on the Continent?"

"Yes, I do, my dear child. To no less a place than the Harz Mountains. I have heard of a most charming school, fifty times better than Middleton School; and you are to

go there, my dear Elma, at my expense. You will go as pupil-teacher, and you thus acquire perfect German. Think what that will mean for you! I propose to leave you in Germany for two years, and at the end of that time you will return and go to Girton, I being responsible for all your expenses. My dear, your fortune is made. I have further arranged with your poor unfortunate mother that you spend the holidays with me, as it is not to be expected that you can associate any longer with such a person nor with that frowzy young woman who calls herself your sister."

Elma did not speak. This news, which would have delighted her at another and less harassing moment, was now fraught with perplexity and alarm. At the same time she thought she saw in it a possible means of escape. Suppose Aunt Charlotte took her away at once, before Kitty had time to tell what she knew, before Middleton School had time to ring with the news of her dishonor. Oh, if so, she might indeed be saved!

"Am I to go immediately?" she asked, choking down a strangled sob in her throat, "or am I to stay at Middleton School till the end of the term?"

"Well, dear, that is the awkward part, for of course you are working very hard for a prize, are you not?"

"I am working for a small scholarship," answered Elma. "If I succeed in my examination I shall obtain a scholarship in English Literature worth ten pounds a year for three years. That would be a very large sum to me, Aunt Charlotte."

"A large sum to you! I should think it would be a large sum to anybody," said Mrs. Steward in a severe tone. "Ten pounds is quite a fortune for any young girl. Pray don't begin to speak of money in that disparaging sort of way, Elma; it ill suits your circumstances, my love. But now, dear, I am sorry to disappoint you—I have heard of an admirable escort; a certain Fräulein Van Brunt is going to the Harz Mountains next Monday; it will therefore be necessary for me to take you back to Buckinghamshire to-night, Elma."

"Oh, Aunt Charlotte, I am glad!" burst from Elma's lips.

"Glad to leave your mother and sister?" said Mrs. Steward, looking severely at the young girl. "After all they are the last people you ought to associate with; but still natural ties, my dear Elma."

"Oh, I am sorry to leave them, I am sorry to go; I am both glad and sorry," gasped poor Elma. "I have been worried, and am glad to get out of everything."

"Worried! I suppose with that dreadful sister and your poor, muddled mother. Her unfortunate habit of weeping has reduced the little brain she possessed to a state of pap. Of course I know she is not well off; but all she absolutely could offer me in this house was a stale egg, and not even toast. Oh, I scorn to complain, but—I know this is not your

wish, Elma. Your ideas were always very different, my dear child."

Elma did not say anything; she was fidgeting with her hand, making a slight noise with the teaspoon which she was tapping against a saucer. The noise was irritating to Mrs. Steward's easily-affected nerves.

"That calm of manner which I trust you will acquire after you have had the advantages which I am giving you will soon show you how very unpleasant those little tattoos and small noises are, Elma," remarked the good lady, taking the teaspoon severely out of her niece's hand. "Yes, my dear, you are to come with me to-night; that is, of course——"

"What do you mean by 'of course,' Aunt Charlotte?"

"After I have seen your head-mistress, Miss Sherrard."

"Do you want to see Miss Sherrard?" asked Elma, a note of alarm in her voice.

"Certainly; and I am going immediately to the school. You will not be admitted into the admirable school in Germany without a testimonial from your present teacher; and I am going to Miss Sherrard in order to secure one. It will, of course be merely a matter of form my asking for it, for your conduct has always been admirable—admirable in the extreme. Miss Sherrard has written to me about you from time to time, and always spoke of you with affection and admiration. She said your abilities were good; your moral character without a flaw. I will just step across to the school now, Elma; and, if you like, you can accompany me."

Elma hesitated. She did not yet know what had taken place; but when she had last seen Kitty there was a flash in her eyes the reverse of assuring. She could only hope against hope that nothing had yet taken place; that Kitty had still kept her miserable secret. If Miss Sherrard knew nothing she would of course give her an excellent character; and she herself would leave Middleton School that afternoon and forever. Then indeed she might snap her fingers at Kitty and her distress. She would be saved just at the very moment when she thought her ruin most imminent.

CHAPTER XXII.

STUNNED AND COLD.

"COME, Elma, what are you looking so thoughtful about?" asked Mrs. Steward in an impatient voice.

"Nothing, Aunt Charlotte," replied Elma, rising to her feet. "I am ready to go," she added. She sighed as she spoke.

"You must give up that unpleasant habit, my dear child. Nothing irritates me more than hearing people sigh. It always seems as if they were discontented and ungrateful to

Providence. Now, what have you, for instance, to sigh about? A singularly fortunate girl, a girl who possesses an aunt who is willing to take a mother's duties upon her shoulders. If it were that wretched, vulgar Carrie now, or even my poor sister herself; but you, Elma, don't let me think that you are ungrateful to me or I wash my hands of you on the spot."

"Oh, I am nothing of the kind indeed, Aunt Charlotte," replied Elma. "I always have felt that you—you were more than good to me."

"Well, my dear, that's as it should be. I honor your feelings. I often say to myself and to your uncle-in-law—remember he is not your real uncle, Elma, but your uncle-in-law, my dear husband, the rector of St. Bartholomew's—'John,' I say, 'if Elma doesn't show gratitude for all I am doing for her I shall once and for all give up the human race. I shall never again expect right feeling from any one.' But of course you are grateful, Elma; you will be the comfort of my old age. You will be as my own child to me. I —I sometimes think, my dear, that when your education is finished and you are turned into a refined, highly-cultivated, highly-trained woman, I will keep you with me. You shall be my companion, my housekeeper, the one who is to read aloud to me, to sit with me in the long evenings when my sight begins to fail. My eyes do ache at times, my dear. I have thought of all that. You will be my adopted child; not that I can leave you anything in my will, but I would provide a home for you while I am left in this tabernacle of the flesh. What do you say, Elma, eh?"

"It is too soon to say anything at present," answered Elma, to whom this prospect was the reverse of charming. To live as her aunt's unsalaried companion could not be attractive to her; but she wisely concluded that sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof, and she had yet to be educated and brought to that calm of spirit and strain of intellect which would satisfy Aunt Charlotte.

"Come now at once," said the good lady, who suddenly from being in a very cross temper became in the best of humor. "We have just nice time to go across to the school, and then after we have seen Miss Sherrard to return here for you to pack your things. What do you say, Elma, to our both staying in London to-night? It would be a pleasant treat for you, and there may be a few little things necessary to add to your wardrobe, which I shall have much pleasure in providing you with. Elma, you are in rare luck. When I think of all I am doing for you I feel that you have indeed much to be thankful for."

"Yes, Aunt Charlotte," echoed Elma, but her voice sounded faint, and she brought out her words with an effort.

Leaning on her niece's arm, Mrs. Steward now pursued her way to Middleton School. Alas! her journey there quickly dissipated her lately-acquired good-humor. She

had not gone one hundred yards before she complained of the dust of the roads, she had not gone two before her anger was great at the length of the way, and when she found that it was necessary to mount up-hill her complaints became loud grievances—in short, by the time she really arrived at the school she was in as bad a temper as Elma had ever seen her in.

"What it is to have a great girl like you hanging on to one, dependent on one!" she cried. "It was most inconsiderate of Caroline to marry as she did, and she now even complains when I blame her for it. She is an extraordinary person. If she had remained single she might have been living comfortable with me at St. Bartholomew's rectory, and you and Carrie would never have been in the world plaguing your relatives."

"Well, you see we are in the world," said poor Elma, who felt that she must just show the faintest spark of spirit. "We did not ask to be born," she added, "so I don't see that we are to be blamed."

Mrs. Steward favored her with a sharp glance.

"Elma," she said, "if you indulge in pertness I shall wash my hands of you. Now, here we are. Have the goodness to ring the bell."

The great school door was opened presently by a neat-looking maid-servant, and Mrs. Steward inquired in a tart voice if Miss Sherrard was in.

"She is, ma'am," replied the girl; "but she is particularly engaged at this moment. Oh, is that you, Miss Lewis?" she continued. "Miss Sherrard is just sending for you, miss; but I don't think the messenger has gone yet. I'll run and stop him. Will you walk inside, ma'am!"

"A messenger for me!" murmured Elma. She felt terribly uncomfortable; her face grew whiter than ever.

"Will you have the goodness to tell your mistress that I wish to speak to her at once," said Mrs. Steward; "that I am in a hurry, and cannot be kept waiting? Pray mention, my name, Mrs. Steward, from St. Bartholomew's Rectory, Buckinghamshire."

The girl promised to do so, and withdrew. She soon returned to say that Miss Sherrard would be pleased to see both Mrs. Steward and Miss Lewis in her private room.

"I wish to see Miss Sherrard alone," said Mrs. Steward. "Remain where you are, Elma." Mrs. Steward sailed out of the room, and poor Elma sank down on the nearest chair.

"If Miss Sherrard has sent for me she must know something," thought the wretched girl. "Oh! how am I to live through it? She will tell Aunt Charlotte, and then all my prospects are over."

Meanwhile Mrs. Steward sailed down the passage with a dignity and majesty of demeanor which impressed Miss Sherrard's neat handmaid considerably. The next instant she was ushered into the school-mistress' presence.

Miss Sherrard looked troubled; she came forward to meet Mrs. Steward very gravely, and, motioning with her hand to a chair, asked her to seat herself. Mrs. Steward stared for a moment at the head-mistress, and the head-mistress stared back at her. At last Mrs. Steward said glibly:

"I am sorry to take up any of your valuable time, Miss Sherrard; but I think I can explain my errand in a few words. I am about to remove my niece, Elma Lewis, from the school."

"Indeed, I am heartily glad to hear it," answered Miss Sherrard, visible relief both in her tone and face.

"What an extraordinary remark for you to make! But I will pass it by, for I am in a considerable hurry. I have heard of an admirable school in Germany to which I intend to send my niece. Not that I have the least objection to your mode of teaching, Miss Sherrard, nor to this very celebrated school; but of course when it comes to foreign languages you cannot compare England to the Continent."

"Certainly not," answered Miss Sherrard, who was now staring at the other lady in some wonder.

"It is my intention to remove Elma to-night," continued Mrs. Steward; "for although it is not quite the end of term, yet the Harz Mountains are some distance away, and it would not be possible for a young girl who has at present no knowledge of the German language to go so far without an escort. Miss Sherrard, you will be glad to hear that an escort has been found, a suitable escort, and Elma will leave England next week. Under these circumstances I propose to take her back to my husband's rectory in Buckinghamshire to-morrow morning, and she will leave the school now."

"Indeed! I repeat that this is a most fortunate coincidence. I am glad to hear it," said Miss Sherrard.

"Your remarks seem to me the reverse of flattering; but I have no time to ask you to explain them. What I have really come about is this: It is necessary for Elma to have a certificate from her present mistress in order to be admitted into the very first-class school in Germany where I propose to place her. Will you kindly give me a testimonial in my niece's favor, Miss Sherrard? Just say anything you can to the credit of her character and general attainments. From your many letters to me I judge that you have a very high opinion of the dear girl; and I trust, now that I am doing so much, in starting this young girl in life, that I shall not go unrewarded. The care of the young is a sad trial, Miss Sherrard, and I doubt not that the looking after Elma will worry me considerably; but I am not one to shirk my duties, and I am willing to take all this responsibility, and for the future to regard that young girl as if she were indeed my own child. But I must have the testimonial, so will you kindly write it at once."

Miss Sherrard had been sitting with her hands clasped in her lap while Mrs. Steward was speaking. Once she had

lowered her eyes; but during the greater part of the time they were fixed upon the good lady's face. A look of consternation, almost akin to despair, flitted now over the teacher's expressive countenance.

When at last Mrs. Steward ceased to speak, Miss Sherrard still remained for nearly half a minute quite silent.

"You will perhaps oblige me by writing the testimonial?" said Mrs. Steward in a very haughty voice. Then she added, perceiving that something was wrong, and finding it impossible to guess what, "I dare say you are annoyed at Elma leaving the school so unexpectedly——"

"No, no; nothing of the kind," said Miss Sherrard. "I have told you twice, Mrs. Steward, that I am glad, very glad of this."

"Your words surprise me; but of course you will write—my time is precious, I have not a moment to lose."

Miss Sherrard now stood up.

"I cannot give Elma Lewis a testimonial with regard to conduct." The words came out quietly, firmly, distinctly.

Mrs. Steward sprang to her feet.

"You cannot give my niece a testimonial with regard to conduct?" she gasped. "Do you know what you are saying, what you are doing, Miss Sherrard?"

"Perfectly well, Mrs. Steward."

"In your letters to me you have invariably spoken of Elma's conduct as excellent. Miss Sherrard, you surely forget yourself—you cannot be well; you must be mistaking Elma for one of your other pupils? She has always been an exemplary girl. You cannot give her a testimonial with regard to conduct? Am I to believe the testimony of my own ears?"

"I am deeply sorry; I have seldom been more grieved about anything. I am told that Elma has accompanied you here—if you will permit me, I will send for her, and explain how matters really stand in your presence."

"Oh, this is intolerable," said Mrs. Steward, clasping and unclasping her hands in her agitation. "The wicked girl, what has she done? Pray send for her at once, Miss Sherrard; if she has done anything really disgraceful I wash my hands of her. If you, her mistress, cannot give her a certificate, do you suppose that my husband and I will take her up?"

"It is impossible for me to say, madam. In this emergency to really help Elma would be a Christian act. She may have been tempted beyond her strength, but you will be better able to decide when you know the circumstances."

As Miss Sherrard spoke she rang the bell. When the servant appeared, she desired her to bring Elma immediately into her presence. A moment later the young girl entered the room. She gave a wild and frightened glance first at her aunt, then at Miss Sherrard, then stepping forward, fell on her knees.

"Has Kitty told you?" she gasped.

"Yes, Elma. Get up; you cannot kneel to me."

"Rise this minute, you wicked girl!" said Mrs. Steward. Elma staggered to her feet.

"It is all up, then," she murmured.

"I know everything, Elma," said Miss Sherrard. "The knowledge has come to me as a painful surprise. Your aunt has just asked me to give you a testimonial with regard to character. I am bitterly pained to say that I must refuse to do so."

"But what does it all mean," cried Mrs. Steward, "and why am I to be kept in the dark any longer? Elma, stop twirling your thumbs; stand back. Now, Miss Sherrard, I have paid the school fees for Elma Lewis for the last four years, so I presume I am entitled to know all about her. Tell me what has occurred. Of what she is accused?"

Miss Sherrard then briefly related the story which had been told to her by Kitty.

It was exactly the sort of tale which would affect a woman of Mrs. Steward's caliber disagreeably. She listened with a horror-stricken face. When the school-mistress had finished, she said abruptly:

"What do you propose to do now?"

"It will be necessary for me to explain the whole circumstances of Elma's wrong-doing to the entire school to-morrow," said Miss Sherrard. "This is necessary for the sake of Kitty Malone."

"At what hour do you propose to make this very pleasant exhibition of my niece?"

"After prayers to-morrow morning—I sent for you, Elma," continued Miss Sherrard, "to tell you, as I thought you ought to be prepared."

"Thank you," answered Elma, her head bowed on her breast. She felt stunned and cold. The dreadful blow had fallen; but the acute misery which was immediately to follow was not at present awakened within her.

"Come, Elma," said Mrs. Steward. She turned to leave the room. Just as she reached the door she looked back at Miss Sherrard.

"After you have exposed Elma, and ruined her character for life, you will doubtless expel her?" she said.

"I hope not—I think not."

"In any case she leaves the school, for I pay no more fees. Come, Elma."

CHAPTER XXIII.

STARS AND MOON, AND GOD BEHIND.

During the long walk home to Constantine Road the elder and the younger lady maintained an absolute silence. As

soon as they got to the house Mrs. Steward turned to Elma for the first time and spoke.

"Find out immediately if your mother is in. If she is tell her I wish to see her. Go; don't stare at me."

Elma went without a word. Her mother was in, and so was Carrie.

"Mother," said Elma, "Aunt Charlotte wants to see you."

"Why, my dear Elma, what is the matter? How queer you look!"

"Don't mind about me, mother, pray; the expression of my face is not worth considering. Aunt Charlotte is waiting for you in the dining-room."

Mrs. Lewis gave a profound sigh.

"How very unreasonable of Charlotte!" she said; "she will doubtless be expecting more tea and cream and fresh eggs, and other impossibilities."

"Oh, go, mother, and stop talking," said Elma.

Mrs. Lewis dragged herself up from the sofa on which she was reclining.

"I really don't know what the world is coming to," she said. "Even my own children are turning out quite disagreeable to me. Dear! dear! what it is to be a mother! How little those who are fortunate in not possessing children understand the burden!"

She went down-stairs slowly, and Elma turned to Carrie.

Carrie was standing with her back to her; she was making up something in tissue-paper.

"Well, Elma," she said, looking up at her sister, "what is up?"

"Everything is up," said Elma.

"What do you mean?"

"Everything is up and everything is over. What are you doing with that paper, Carrie?"

"I am folding up the money I have just got for Kitty Malone?"

"The money you have got for Kitty Malone! Has—has Sam Raynes returned the sovereigns?"

"Bless you, poor Sam can't do impossibilities. No; this money has nothing whatever to do with Sam. I am folding it up, and giving her a little account with it. We got exactly eleven pounds eleven shillings for the clothes and the watch and chain. She can redeem them all within a month if she likes. Here is the pawnbroker's receipt; tell her to keep it until she does. She can redeem them whenever she cares to pay back eleven pounds eleven shillings with interest. My commission at ten per cent. is one pound three shillings and tenpence—that leaves a balance of ten pounds seven shillings and twopence; it will doubtless get her nicely out of her difficulty. She ought to be thankful to me to her dying day. Look here, Elma, if you are worried about things—and I can guess what is the matter pretty well; for I happen to know that Kitty Malone made a clean breast of your secret not long

ago—you will be glad to get out of the house. Here, take this money to her, and be off, can't you?"

Elma still did not speak. That cold, stunned feeling was pressing round her heart. She did not much care whether she was in the house or not. Just at that moment, however, a loud slam of the front door caused both the girls to run to the window. Mrs. Steward had sailed down the steps. Mrs. Steward with her long train streaming behind her, was walking up Constantine Road. The next instant Mrs. Lewis burst into the room.

"Well, Elma," she cried, "this is a pretty state of things. Your aunt has told me everything. What a miserable woman I am!"

"Please, don't scold me," said Elma. "I have had enough scolding during the last hour to last me my life. Say what you like to me to-morrow."

"But your aunt says she washes her hands of you. How are you to be educated? How are you to live? How are you to support yourself?"

"I don't know. I don't think it much matters."

"Don't talk in that silly way, Elma; of course it matters. She says too that you are to be publicly exposed at Middleton School to-morrow, and your conduct—I must I could not make out what she was talking about; I don't see that you did anything very wrong—but your conduct is to be proclaimed to the school, and that you are to be, if not expelled, something like it. Elma, this is enough to take all my senses away!"

"Never mind, now, mother; we can talk it all over presently," said Elma. "Give me the money, Carrie, and let me go."

Carrie handed her sister the little parcel without a word. Elma walked slowly out of the room.

A moment later she found herself on the dusty road. She reached the top of the ugly street, and then paused to look around her. To her right lay the peaceful valley in which Middleton School was situated. A little further away was the open country, beautiful, verdant, full of summer splendor. Gwin Harley's house could be seen in the distance.

"If only Gwin had been my friend this morning, all these terrible things need not have happened," thought Elma. "I have nothing to thank Gwin for; I have nothing to thank Kitty for. I am a miserable, forlorn, forsaken girl. There is nothing before me but the most wretched life. Shall I go to see Kitty? Does Kitty deserve anything at my hands? I have got ten pounds seven shillings and twopence in my pocket. Why should I not go right away with the money. I don't think Kitty would prosecute me; and if she did would it matter? I am so hopeless that I don't think anything much worse could happen to me. I know I could not stand being publicly exposed to-morrow at the school. I cannot have

those hundreds of eyes fixed on me; I, who have always been looked up to, respected, who belonged to the Tug-of-war Society. I cannot, cannot bear it. Why should Kitty have this money? She has treated me badly. She promised not to tell. She had no right to break her word. I cannot see her at present; no, I cannot."

Elma walked down the road. She longed beyond words to get into a fresh place, to be where there was no chance of meeting a Middleton girl She walked faster and faster. Presently she found herself at the little station; she had not an idea where to go nor what to do. She had no luggage with her. It would look queer her going away without even a handbag. It would look very much as if she were running away. All the girls belonging to Middleton School had to wear a badge on their hats, and Elma would therefore be known. She would be recognized as one of the pupils. Nevertheless she thought she would risk it, for the longing to go away got stronger and stronger.

The railway station happened to be rather empty at this time. She looked around her hastily, saw no one that she knew about, and went into the booking-office. She hastily made up her mind to take a ticket for a large seaport town a few miles distant. She asked for a third-class single ticket to Saltbury, inquired when the next train came up, and a few moments later found herself on the right platform waiting for it. It came in within a quarter of an hour, and Elma took her seat in a third-class compartment. She was relieved to find that she was in the company of a good-natured-looking, middle-aged woman who was just returning to her own home from doing some marketing at Middleton. She did not take any notice of Elma, who crouched up in the opposite corner, and sat looking out at the country. The woman left the carriage at the next station, and Elma continued her journey for the rest of the way alone. She got to Saltbury within an hour, and stepped out on to the platform. She had been at Saltbury before with her mother and Carrie. They had once spent a never-to-be-forgotten week there when Mrs. Lewis had a ten-pound note in her pocket which she resolved to devote to a treat at the seaside. Elma wondered if she might venture to go to the little cottage in the suburbs of Saltbury where she had spent this week. After reflection, however, she thought that it would not be wise to venture, for if she were missed it would be very easy to trace her to Saltbury, and then this cottage would be the first to seek for her in. Accordingly she went into the more thronged and populous part of the town. The expensive season had not yet begun, and she presently went into a neat little house with "Apartments" written on a card in the window. She asked for a bed for the night. The landlady, a ruddy-faced young woman, immediately said she could accommodate her, and took Elma up-stairs to the top of the house to show her a neat little bedroom.

"You can have this for half a crown a night, miss," she said. "Are you likely to make a long stay?"

"I don't know," answered Elma; "I can't be sure. I want the room for one night, and then I'll let you know."

"Very well, miss, that's quite satisfactory, and I can get in anything you like in the way of food. If you happened to wish for a sitting-room, miss——"

"Oh, no, a bedroom will be enough," answered Elma. "I do not care to go to the expense of a sitting-room."

"You left your luggage I suppose, miss, at the railway station?"

Elma colored and then turned pale.

"No," she said; "I have not brought any luggage with me."

The woman stared, opening her eyes very wide, now giving Elma a full and particular attention which she had not hitherto vouchsafed to her. She said nothing further, and Elma went down-stairs.

"I'll go down to the beach for a little," she said. "You might have some tea ready for me when I come back. I am very tired, and should like some tea and toast."

"And a hegg, miss, or anything of that sort?"

"No, thank you; just tea and toast, please. Nothing more."

The woman stared after her as she went down the street. Elma got as far as the beach; she then sat down on a bench and gazed out at the waves. The tide was coming in. The beach at Saltbury was celebrated, and children were playing about, amusing themselves gathering shells, making sand-castles, and otherwise disporting themselves after the manner of their kind. A little boy was wading far out. Elma wached him with lack-luster eyes. She wondered vaguely how long he would be allowed to wade, and how deep he might go. He got as far as his knees, and then turned back. As he was going back he fell, wetting himself and crying out lustily.

Elma continued to gaze at him with eyes which scarcely saw.

"He thinks he is hurt," she said to herself, "that he has had a terrible misfortune. How little he knows what real pain means, and what real misfortune is! Here am I with money in my pocket which does not belong to me, having run away from home, disgraced for life, miserable for life. Oh! what shall I do?"

It had been a very hot day, but the evening was chilly, and Elma shivered at she went back to her lodgings in South Street. She had brought away no wraps with her, and her thin cotton dress was not sufficient to keep out the chill of the sea breezes. She thought she would be glad to get under shelter, to go to bed, to wrap herself up and cover her face and court sleep. When she got to the door, however, the young landlady, who was evidently waiting for her, came out on to the steps.

"If you please, miss," she said, "I am really very sorry, but my husband thinks——"

"What?" said Elma.

"That as you have no luggage, miss (you know it ain't customary for us to take in ladies without luggage)——"

"Then you mean—" said Elma, turning very white and pale.

"Yes, miss, I'm ever so sorry."

"You can't give me the room even for one night?"

"We can't really, miss."

"But I can pay in advance," said Elma eagerly.

"I'm ever so sorry, miss; but another lady came just as you left, and she had a box and a handbag, and everything proper, and as she wanted the room very badly, and as we had her before, we have let it to her, miss. I am sure I am very sorry not to oblige; but I dare say— There are a great many other apartments down this road, miss."

"Thank you," said Elma; "it does not matter at all."

She spoke with voice of ice; pride, a remnant of pride, came to her aid. She would not let the woman see how distressed she was.

"Good-evening, miss," said the young landlady. "I'm real sorry not to oblige."

"Oh, it doesn't matter," said Elma; "I dare say I can manage."

She walked down South Street, knowing that the landlady was watching her as she disappeared. She soon came to a corner where four roads met. Where should she go? What could she do? Where was she to have shelter for the night?

It occurred to her that after all there was nothing now left to her but to return to Middleton. She hurried up to the railway station, and asked when the next train would start. A porter who was standing just inside the station informed her that the last train for Middleton had left five minutes ago.

"The next will be at seven to-morrow morning," he said.

"Thank you," answered Elma. She would not allow any of the dismay on her face to appear.

"After all, it is too absurd that I can't have shelter," she said to herself, "when I have over ten pounds in my pocket. What can the landlady have meant? Surely, if I pay my way that is all that is necessary."

But, all the same, she did not like to go and inquire at any other lodging. She could not stand meeting once again the stony stare of a landlady when she explained that she had no luggage, none at all. It occurred to her that she might go into a shop and buy some night-gear, and a small handbag, but she rejected the idea almost as quickly as it came to her.

"It would only waste the money," she said to herself, "and where is the use? I suppose I can manage to spend the night somewhere. Thank goodness it is a fine sum-

mer's night; I might do worse than spend it in the open air."

She wandered away, and presently passing a small restaurant, went in and ordered a cup of tea for herself, and some bread and butter. She drank the tea, but found that to eat choked her. The outlook before her was more miserable moment by moment. She was driven to such despair that it seemed of very little consequence to her whether she succeeded in getting away from Middleton School, from the censorious eyes of the whole of her world, or not. Everything was up with her. She kept repeating that moodily, drearily under her breath. Everything was up; she had not a friend in the wide, wide world.

Having finished her meager meal, she went out again into South Street. She was horrified when she saw the name at one end of the street. She did not want to pass by that neat little house which contained that snug litle bedroom where she had hoped to cover her eyes from the light, and court sleep, in order to get rid of her misery for a few hours.

She had now reached the neighbourhood of the shore. The tide was nearly full in; the great, broad expanse of beach was covered. The children had all gone home to supper and to bed. The stars were coming out in the sky; a full moon was riding in majesty across the heavens. It seemed to Elma, fine as the night was, that the sea moaned in an unreasonable and very dreadful manner. She had to press her hands to her ears to shut away the sound of that moaning sea. She determined to go inland. There was plenty of time, plenty. She could get back to the station by seven in the morning, wait for the first train which returned to Middleton, and reach the school after all in time for her exposure.

She turned her steps now countrywise, and after walking for a mile or two found that she was too weary to go any further. She crept inside a narrow opening in a hedge, and got into a field. Here she was absolutely alone; not a human being was in sight. As far as she could tell there was not a living creature near. She felt the grass; it was heavy with dew. She had always heard that it was very dangerous to sit down on grass soaked with dew, but danger now was of no moment to her.

"It would be rather nice to be ill; it would be rather nice to die." She had nothing left to live for. Her whole life had been a mistake. She had tried hard to get away from her own set, the set in which she was born. She had made a mess of it; she had failed. Her own set—the narrow-minded, the vulgar, the low—were the only ones who could claim her, who could touch her, who could have anything in common with her. How terribly shocked Miss Sherrard had been at what she had done. How disgusted, how coldly, terribly cruel Aunt Charlotte had been; but her mother had thought very little about it, and Carrie would love her just

as much after her disgraceful conduct as she had done before.

"I belong to them, and they belong to me," thought poor Elma. "My ambitions were wrong; I shall sink now, and become a second Carrie. No, I shall never marry a Sam Raynes, but I shall become a sour old maid. Perhaps I shall do charring some day, there is no saying. I did wrong to try to raise myself. I——"

She never saw where her fault lay. She was not really repentant for her wrongdoing. The consequences were terrible, but the sin did not trouble her.

After a time, terribly exhausted and weary, she lay down just as she was on the soaking wet grass, and fell asleep. She had been chilled and tired before she slept; but when in the very middle of the night she awoke she had never known anything like the bitter cold which she experienced. She could not at first remember where she was; but all too soon memory with a flash return to her. She remembered all the events of yesterday. She knew that she was a runaway, that she had stolen money in her pocket. She might be arrested and put in prison; there was no saying what awful fate lay before her. In the dead of night lying there she became really frightened; she almost felt as if she could scream aloud in her terror. How empty the world seemed, how hollow! She wished the stars overhead would not blink at her; she wished the moon would go behind a cloud; she felt as if God Himself was looking at her through the face of the moon, and she did not like it. She covered her face with her cold and trembling hands and tried to shut away what she felt might be the face of God Himself.

"I have been a very wicked girl," she moaned, and now, for the first time, she thought not so much of the consequences as of the sin. Tears rained from her eyes; she sat up and covered her face.

"God help me! Please, God, don't be too angry with me: I am the most miserable girl in the world," she faltered.

After that frightened cry or prayer she felt more comfortable; and now, staggering to her feet, she saw, standing about ten yards away, and looking at her fixedly out of its large and luminous eyes, a brown cow. There were several more cows in the field, and this one had come up, and was gazing inquiringly at her. The motherly creature could not imagine what desolate and queer young thing this was, up and awake in the middle of the night. Such creatures as Elma, in the cow's experience, were not to be seen at these inclement hours. It lashed its long tail slowly from side to side, and kept gazing at her; and Elma looked at it, and her nervous terrors grew worse. The cow had horns; suppose it came near, and tried to horn her. She was not a country girl, and did not understand country creatures. A bitter cry of abject terror rose from her lips. She darted

past the animal, rushed out by the way she had come into the field, and found herself once more on the highroad.

The cow, its curiosity very faintly tickled by the appearance of Elma on the scene placidly resumed its feeding, and the terrified girl ran as if she had wings to her feet, up the highroad.

In after days she was never able to tell how she spent the remainder of that night; but the longest hours only herald in the dawn, and at last the sun arose and the worst of her fears were over. The sun warmed her, and took away the dreadful feeling of chill which she was experiencing. She wandered about, sitting down now and then, too feeble, too tired, too utterly depressed to have room even for active fears, and at last the time came when she might again present herself at the station.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SUNSHINE AGAIN.

When Carrie left her, Kitty Malone was buoyed up with a certain degree of hope. Carrie had spoken with confidence; she had assured her that her clothes were worth money. Never before, much as she prized pretty things, had they seemed so valuable in poor Kitty's eyes. If Carrie would really keep her word it would be possible for Kitty to send Laurie the money which he wanted that evening. Could she do this her worst anxieties would be laid to rest, and she felt that it would be even possible for her to try to be good once more. As things were at present, she cared nothing at all about being either good or bad. Every thought of her mind was fixed upon Laurie; if he were saved she would be good; if not—if he indeed, the darling of her heart, went to the dogs—nothing mattered.

Kitty was too restless and miserable to go down to the rest of the family. She walked up and down, up and down her bedroom, watching and and longing for Carrie. Now and then she would rush to the window, putting out her head and shoulders and half her body, to watch if by any chance Carrie might be coming up the street. That red-faced, fat, uninteresting-looking young woman now represented all Kitty's hopes.

When darkness set in, however, when the hours first struck nine and then ten, poor Kitty gradually saw the last star in her firmament expire. Without doubt Carrie had failed to pawn the things.

"And I thought them so good, whispered Kitty to herself. "Aunt Bridget would be sure to choose nice and expensive things. Perhaps they were too good for the people who come to the pawnbroker for their clothes. That must be

the reason; but I wonder Carrie did not come back to tell me."

Presently Alice bustled into the room, and, opening the door of the large wardrobe which the girls shared between them, began to make active search for a neat little jacket which she wanted to put on. She was going out for the evening, and wished to wear it when she was returning home. Search as she would, however, she could not find it, and presently turned to ask Kitty if she had seen it.

"Dear me, no," answered Kitty, starting and blushing. "Is it not in the wardrobe?"

"No," replied Alice. "And I remember I hung it on this peg. Where can it possibly have disappeared to? Don't you know anything about it, Kitty? By the way, how wonderfully empty the wardrobe looks! Have you been putting your clothes back into your boxes?"

Kitty who had been standing in the middle of the room looking the very picture of despair, now burst into a hearty peal of laughter.

"What are you laughing about?" asked Alice.

"I am awfully afraid it has happened," she cried.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, that your jacket has gone to the pawn."

"Kitty!" cried Alice looking at the Irish girl in some alarm, "have you gone mad?"

"No, Alice; but I am dreadfully afraid all the same that it has happened; indeed, there can be no doubt of it."

Kitty laughed again. She often cried when she laughed and now the tears ran down her cheeks.

"Well, this is too funny!" she gasped between her paroxysms of mirth.

"I don't think it funny at all. I think you must have taken leave of your senses. Kitty, please, explain yourself."

"I will try to, Alice. Oh, don't frown at me so horribly, or I shall go off into fits of laughter again. This is the simple truth. I wanted money very, very badly. I could not get it, and Carrie Lewis——"

"Carrie Lewis? Who is she?" asked Alice.

"Oh, don't be so ridiculous, Alice. Of course you know who Carrie Lewis is. She is Elma's sister. She came here to-day."

"How very interesting! What a nice set of people you seem to be getting to know! I wasn't aware that you were acquainted with any of the Lewises except Elma."

"Well, I am acquainted with Carrie now, and I rather like her. She is great fun, much more fun than you are. She is vulgar, of course; but really that does not matter. She called to see me, and as I happened to want money she suggested pawning some of my things for me. I conclude she took your jacket by mistake with the rest."

Alice was so stunned absolutely by this news that no

words would come to her. She stared at Kitty, her face growing whiter and more wooden-looking each moment. Then, without vouchsafing a syllable of reply, she left the room, banging the door behind her."

"There, I have given her a good settler," thought Kitty; and for a moment the feeling that Alice was as uncomfortable as she was herself gave her a certain sense of satisfaction.

The last post brought a letter from Laurie. It was brief, and was written in frantic hurry and despair.

"My dear Kitty," wrote the boy, "what has come to you? I am looking for a letter by every post, but none arrives. I shall not be able to give Wheel-about the money I promised him on Saturday, and know he will not keep my secret any longer. When father hears it, all is up. If I don't receive that money by Saturday morning I shall run away to sea.—LAURIE."

The letter fluttered from poor Kitty's fingers to the floor. She felt stunned; there was a cold weight now at her heart, which made it almost impossible for her to move or even think. If Laurie did not get the money by Saturday morning he would run away to sea. This was Thursday evening. There was still time, just time, to save him. Oh, if only Carrie would come! How dreadful, how terrible of her to fail Kitty at such a moment as this! Laurie was just the sort of boy to do what he said. The longing to go to sea had been one of the innermost cravings of his heart for many years. If he did so, the squire would never forgive him. His career would be ruined. Bad and awful as an English school in Kitty's opinion would be, the fate which he now had mapped out for himself would be much worse. The cruel, cruel sea might even drown him. Kitty might never behold her Laurie again. He was the joy of her heart and the light of her eyes. She uttered a piercing cry, and fell down half-fainting by her bedside. She lay so for the greater part of an hour, then struggling to her feet got into bed without undressing, and pulled the bedclothes well over her head.

When Alice came in very late that evening she thought that Kitty was asleep, and did not disturb her; but all during the long hours of that miserable night poor Kitty lay awake, her heart beating loud, terrible visions passing before her eyes. Toward morning she fell into a troubled sleep, to awake again quite early. Her head ached badly, her pulses beat too quickly; she could not stand her hot bed any longer. Springing up, she went into the bath-room turned on the cold water, and refreshed herself with a bath. She felt really desperate and quite impervious to all ideas of discipline. She made up her mind to go to the Lewises, knock up Carrie, and demand an account of the property which she had confided to her on the previous day. Even still there was just—just time to save Laurie, for if she

could catch the early post he would receive his money on Saturday morning.

Kitty found herself at Constantine Road between seven and eight o'clock. The blinds of Carrie's bedroom window were still down, for the Lewises were not early risers. Maggie, however, was up, and when Kitty rang the bell she opened the door for her.

"Miss Malone!" she cried.

"I want to see Miss Carrie at once," cried Kitty. "Is she up, Maggie?"

"Not she, miss. She's sound asleep and in bed. But I'll run up and tell her that you are here. Please come into the dining-room, Miss Malone."

Maggie threw open the door of this by-no-means luxurious apartment, and then ran up-stairs to inform Carrie of Kitty's unexpected arrival.

"Now, what can be up?" thought Carrie. "Surely she is satisfied. I did very well for her."

She dressed herself hastily, and in five minutes was standing by Kitty's side.

"What is it?" she asked. "Are you not pleased? Elma took you the money, did she not? She must have stayed with one of the Middleton School girls for the night, for she never returned home; but she took you the money. I thought I did very well by you. Were you not satisfied?"

"She took me the money?" cried Kitty, turning pale. "No; that she did not. I never had any money. What do you mean, Carrie?"

"What I say," answered Carrie. "Oh, do sit down, Kitty; you look quite ghastly. I gave Elma ten pounds seven shillings and twopence to give you. I got eleven guineas for your things, including the watch and chain. After I deducted my ten per cent., the balance for you was ten pounds seven and twopence. I thought you would be delighted. Did she not take you the money early yesterday evening?"

"No. I have never seen her."

"But she left here quite early on purpose. She said she was going straight to your house. I sent you plenty of money, did I not?"

"How much did you say?" asked Kitty, putting her hand up to her forehead in a distracted way.

"Ten pounds seven and twopence. You only really wanted eight pounds, did you not?"

"I had a little money of my own, and eight pounds would have done," said Kitty in a low voice; "but——"

Here she sprang forward and gripped Carrie by the arm. "What does it mean, Carrie—what does it mean? Elma never came near me; I never, never saw her last night."

"You never saw her? Elma never went to you?"

"No, never. Do you think I would tell an untruth? I never saw her, not since early school yesterday. Oh, Carrie, tell me what it means?"

"I cannot. I must say it looks very queer," said Carrie. She frowned, turned her back partly upon Kitty, and supporting her fat chin on one of her dimpled hands, began to think deeply. The more she thought the less she liked the aspect of affairs.

"Carrie, what does it mean?" cried Kitty, reiterating her words in a kind of frenzy of agitation.

"Oh, stop talking to me for a minute, Kitty! I must think this out."

Carrie walked to the window, pulled up the blinds, threw the sash up, and allowed the fresh morning air to blow upon her hot face. After a time she turned round and faced Kitty.

"You may well look pale," she said. "I confess I am as bewildered as you are yourself. Of course Elma may have been taken ill—she had a dreadful shock yesterday."

"How?"

"You are silly to talk like that. Don't you know?"

"You mean because I told about her?"

"Well, it turned out very badly, as badly as possible. You did tell, and when you did so you ruined her. If you had only kept that precious story to yourself, even for twenty-four hours, little Elma would have been made—made for life; but you ruined her."

"Oh, do please tell me what you mean! My head is going round in a whirl; I can scarcely follow you."

"You can pull yourself together if you like. This is what happened. I told you, did I not, yesterday, that Aunt Charlotte pays Elma's fees at Middleton School?"

"I think so, but I don't quite remember."

"That is so like you. I always said you were selfish."

"Think what you like, Carrie; but please tell me everything."

"Oh, I'm quite willing. This is the story. Aunt Charlotte came here yesterday. She had heard of a splendid school in Germany, where Elma was to be sent as pupil-teacher. She wanted Elma to leave Middleton School at once, as she had found an escort to take her to Germany; but before Elma could be admitted into this new school it was necessary for her to have a certificate from Miss Sherrard. Now you see daylight, don't you? My aunt, Mrs. Steward, went o see Miss Sherrard, taking Elma with her. Elma did not know that you had put a match to the mine, and of course Aunt Charlotte knew nothing about it. When Miss Sherrard was asked to give Elma a certificate for conduct, she refused point-blank. Of course the mine exploded. Elma was called in, and all your nice, miserable story told to Aunt Charlotte. Elma is to be publicly exposed at Middleton School to-day; and Aunt Charlotte has washed her hands of her forever. There! that's what you have done. We have much to thank you for, have we not?"

Kitty's face had grown whiter and whiter.

"You blame me very much for what I am not to be blamed for," she said after a pause.

"That's what you think. You're an Irish girl, and you think nothing of a promise. You promised Elma you would not tell. You lent her the money, and you promised you would not tell about it. You broke your promise, and you have ruiner her for life. There! that's what has happened. I wish you joy of the nice state your conscience must be in."

"You are very bitter to me, Carrie; but cannot quite see my side of the question. I would not have told about Elma if Elma had been in the least true to me, but she was not, not a bit. All the same, I am terribly, terribly sorry for her. I would not have got her into this scrape if I had known."

"Aye, you had no thought, you see. You just blurted out everything."

"I am very miserable," said poor Kitty. She clasped her trembling hands together, and tears slowly welled into her beautiful dark-blue eyes. Carrie watched her with anxiety.

"There, now I like you," she said, after a pause. "You look awfully pretty with those tears in your eyes, and——"

"Pretty, do I?" said Kitty. For a moment a pleased smile flitted across her face, but then it faded; the present anxiety was too intense for her to give much thought to her personal appearance.

"Where can Elma be?" she said.

"Ah, that's the dreadful part. I don't know. She went out of the house with your money. She evidently never took it to you. I am sure I cannot think what has happened to her."

"And my money is gone?" said Kitty.

"So it seems—that is, unless we can find Elma. It is all very dreadful, very horrible. I suppose the plain English of the matter is this"—here Carrie gulped something down in her throat—"that she—she stole your money and has run away with it."

"Carrie, you cannot think so!"

"It is what I have to think," answered Carrie. "It is a mighty unpalatable truth, I can tell you. I suppose, now, your next step will be to prosecute her, to send the police after her, and have her locked up. Then you will ruin me too, for Sam Raynes—not that he is overparticular, nor that he cares twopence about refinement, or anything of that sort—would not care to marry a girl whose—whose sister was put in prison. That's your next step isn't it, Kitty Malone?"

"I won't stop to listen to you," said Kitty; "you are too terrible."

She ran to the door, opened it, and the next moment found herself in the street. She walked fast, ugly words repeating themselves in her ears. Carrie had been very blunt, and had given the petted, half-spoiled girl some home truths to think about. Had she really been unkind in telling about

Elma? Oh, what was right and what was wrong? What was the matter? Could she ever, ever in the whole course of her existence, have a light heart again? She walked up the street, little caring what she was doing or where she was going. At the next corner she came plump upon Elma herself, who was coming slowly, very slowly in the direction of Constantine Road. When she saw her, poor Kitty gave a sudden shout.

"Oh, Elma!" she said, "how glad I am—how glad I am!"

"What do you mean?" said Elma. Her voice was faint.

"I thought I might never see you again. I thought—I don't know what I thought—but you have come back."

"I ran away, and I have come back again," said Elma. "You can punish me if you like, Kitty; things can never be much worse than they are." Here she staggered, and would have fallen had not Kitty held her up.

"How dreadfully bad you look! But oh, the relief of seeing you again!" said Kitty. "Where have you been? What have you done?"

"I scarcely know what I have done, or where I have been. I have a noise in my head, a queer noise. My head aches so badly it seems as if it would never leave off again. I am going to school, and they are going to expose me. It was all because you told, Kitty. And here is nearly all your money." Elma put her hand into her pocket. "I must tell you everything, Kitty; for nothing really matters now. I meant to take that money. I meant to steal it all, but when it came to the point I found I could not. Here is most of it back. I spent three shillings on my fare to Saltbury and back, and sixpence on tea last night. That leaves ten pounds three and eight pence. Here, count it, won't you, Kitty? Take it in your hand. Here are the ten sovereigns, and the three shillings, and the sixpence and twopence. Have you got them all right? I must owe you the balance, but I'll pay you soon—soon."

Elma's voice sounded weaker and weaker. Kitty clasped the money; her small fingers closed over it, her eyes grew bright, a flaming color rose into each of her cheeks, and it was as if new life was put into her.

"How bad you look!" she cried; "but oh, how happy I am to have this money! Never mind for a moment what you meant to do; I have it now, and I forgive you with my whole heart. Let us go straight to the nearest post-office. I must get a postal order for eight pounds immediately. Come, Elma, come."

"But what do you mean? Why should I go with you?"

"Because you must—because I am not going to part with you—not yet. Come, come at once. Oh, how dead tired you look! You are not to go back to that dreadful little house of yours—not yet. Here is a nice-looking restaurant. You just go straight in, and I'll go on to the post-office and send off the postal order to the dear old boy. He is saved

now, and I am saved; nothing—nothing else matters. Dear Elma, of course I forgive you; pray don't look so miserable. I felt fit to die five minutes ago, but now I am as well and jolly as possible. Here, Elma, come into the restaurant and wait."

Kitty had clutched hold of Elma's arm, and now she dragged her into a large, bright-looking restaurant, which they were just passing. The next moment Elma found herself seated by a small marble table. Kitty was ordering tea or something, Elma could not quite make out what, nor did she care. Everything was dreamy and unreal to her.

"I'll be back in a minute, Elma," cried Kitty. Her flashing eyes smiled as they glanced at Elma. Elma tried to smile back, but could not. The next moment Kitty was out of the place. She was back again in less than a quarter of an hour.

"I have done it," she cried, "and my heart is as light as a feather. I have sent off the postal order to Laurie; he will be saved now. Oh, it is so comforting; and we have a little over two pounds for ourselves."

"For ourselves—what do you mean?" said Elma.

"Why, of course, we'll divide it and have a jolly time. Aren't you going to have your breakfast? I'm as hungry as a hawk."

As Kitty spoke she poured out a cup of tea, added milk to it, and pushed it toward Elma. Elma drank it off, and when she had done so the confused feeling in her head got a little better. Kitty then began to speak in a low, excited whisper.

"Let us do something," she said. "Let us do something quite mad and wild and jolly. We have got out of our scrape."

"You have; but I am in it up to my neck," said poor Elma. "Oh Kitty, I am a miserable, wretched girl!"

"Never mind, you are going to be a jolly girl now, the jolliest girl in the world. Do you think because I am happy again that I am going to leave you to all this misery, particularly after that nice blunt, determined Carrie of yours telling me that it was my fault, and that I would repent it to my dying day? Look here, Elma, did you say that you wanted to go back to Middleton School this morning?"

"I have to. I am to be exposed, you know."

"Not a bit of it. Neither you nor I will go to that hateful school; let us run away."

"Run away? But I have run away and come back again."

"Let us do it over again."

"Kitty, what do you mean?"

"What I say. I have heaps of money; let us go back to Saltbury and enjoy ourselves, Elma. Why can't we take the next train? No one will prevent us; no one will guess where we are. We will have a nice time, a really nice time. Say 'Yes,' Elma, won't you?"

"But would you really go with me?"

"Why not? I am the wild Irish girl, and you are the naughty English girl; let us go off together."

"Well, it does sound tempting," said Elma, her eyes sparkling. "Kitty, it is wonderful of you not to give me up."

"Oh, I am not the sort of girl to give up a friend when she is in trouble. You have made it right for me, and the sun is shining again, and I am as happy as the day is long. Elma, you must come."

"It does sound tempting—I wish my head did not ache so badly."

"It will be better when you get to the seaside."

"Perhaps so, and then I need not go to Middleton School."

"You need never go there again. Oh, don't waste any more time over breakfast. We can eat when we get to Saltbury. I want to get off before Alice and Carrie or any of them begin to miss us. Let us go to the railway station; it is not far off."

Kitty's eager and impetuous words carried the day, and in a quarter of an hour's time the girls found themselves speeding away to Saltbury.

"We have indeed burned our boats now," said Kitty, with a laugh; "we have both run away. Now they have something really to scold us about; but never mind. I never felt more jolly in my life."

CHAPTER XXV.

KITTY "GO-BRAGH" (FOREVER).

But Kitty's happiness was very short-lived, for long before they got to Saltbury Elma was really so ill that she could not hold up her head. Kitty had never seen such severe illness before. She was not easily frightened; she had plenty of pluck when a real emergency arose, and she now determined to do her best for her companion.

"It is all the worry and the misery she has undergone," thought Kitty to herself; "but now that my mind is at rest she will see what a good friend I can be to her." When they got to Saltbury she immediately ordered a cab, and desired the man to drive her to the nearest hotel.

"Oh, Kitty!" gasped poor Elma, "they won't take us in, because we have no luggage, you know."

"I'll manage it," said Kitty; "no luggage—what does that matter?"

She followed Elma into the cab, and a few moments later the girls found themselves at the door of a neat little inn facing the sea. Kitty jumped out and went straight to the bar.

"I want a nice, quiet bedroom," she said, "with two beds in it."

"Certainly, miss," said the woman, glancing into Kitty's bright face.

"It must be a very quiet room," continued Kitty, "for my companion is ill; she has a bad headache, and we must send for a doctor immediately."

"Yes, miss. I'll send the porter out to bring in your luggage."

"That's the annoying part," said Kitty; "we have no luggage."

The woman looked dubious, and turned to glance at a man who approached.

"Two young ladies want a room," she said in a low voice. "One of them is ill, and—they have no luggage."

"Then in that case, miss, I am very sorry—" began the man.

But Kitty interrupted him.

"Don't say those words," she began. "I know exactly what you are going to say, but please don't. We have no luggage, for we—we have run away from school. There now, I have confided in you. Here's father's card. He will be responsible for us. Please show us to your very best room immediately."

As Kitty spoke she took a card out of her sealskin purse and handed it to the woman.

"Dennis Malone, Castle Malone, County Donegal," was inscribed on the small piece of pasteboard. It evidently had a good effect, but a still greater effect was produced by the sparkling and lovely eyes of the handsome girl who spoke in a tone of quiet assurance.

"Father will be so grateful to you for taking us in," she continued. "It would be terrible, you know, if you allowed us to wander about the streets. I am going to telegraph to him now, and he will arrive here, I have no doubt, within the next twenty-four hours. I have not much money with me," added Kitty frankly, "but father will bring plenty—plenty when he arrives."

Again the man and woman whispered together, and now approving and interesting glances turned in Kitty's direction. The woman presently said:

"Very well, miss, we'll do our best for you. Will you follow me, miss?"

She took Kitty and Elma up-stairs and showed them into the best room in the house. In a very short time poor Elma found herself in bed, with Kitty bending over her, kissing her now and then, and whispering kind words in her ears.

"I have managed beautifully with the people of the hotel," whispered Kitty. "And now, darling, you'll be made so comfortable. I am going to make up to you for—for what Carrie said I did."

"But you did nothing; it was I who was bad, very bad," cried Elma.

"Oh, don't begin to get remorseful now, while you are ill.

Wait at least until you are better. I have ordered some fruit and jelly and ice, and I have asked the landlady—isn't she a dear—to send for the doctor."

"It seems like a dream," said Elma. "Is it possible that everything has changed so completely, and you—you, Kitty Malone—you to whom I have acted so badly, are good to me?"

"Yes, yes, I mean to be good to you; but don't begin to fret about your sins until you are better. Leave unpleasant things alone. Go to sleep, Elma; go to sleep."

Kitty went out of the room and stood and reflected for a few moments on the landing.

"Here's a state of things," Kitty said to herself; "but on the whole I rather like it. I knew I should be good in emergencies; I felt that it was in me. I am afraid poor Elma is going to be downright ill. I suppose I did wrong to run away—perhaps I did; but I am so relieved about Laurie that nothing else seems to matter now. I will telegraph immediately to the dear old dad and ask him to come right away here at once. When I see him and know that Laurie is really saved, I'll just tell him everything. Oh, yes, that is the only—only thing to do."

Kitty went straight to the nearest post-office, and in an incredibly short space of time the following message was being carried across the wires to Castle Malone:

"At the Sign of the Red Doe, Saltbury.—You will be surprised, father; but I have run away from school. I will tell you everything when I see you. I am here with a sick girl who has also run away. We have very little money; and I, your Kitty, want you dreadfully. Come to me as quickly as you can.

"Kitty Malone."

"Bless him," said the girl to herself. "He may be angry for a minute, but this message will bring him on the wings of the wind. Now that it has gone off I wonder ought I to let them know at Middleton?"

Kitty reflected earnestly over this problem. She quickly, however, made up her mind to keep her secret to herself.

"A little suspense will be rather good for Alice than otherwise," she thought; "and although Mr. and Mrs. Denvers may be anxious about me they can but telegraph to father; and as he will know my address already it won't put him into a taking. Miss Sherrard too can bear it; and as to Carrie, I am really sorry for poor old Carrie, and I should not much mind having her here; but I think until father comes I will look after Elma my lone self, as they say in Ireland."

Having made up her mind, Kitty went back to the hotel and asked the landlady, with whom she was now great friends, to send for the best doctor in the neighborhood.

Dr. Marchand arrived in the course of the morning, and pronounced Elma to be ill, but not alarmingly so.

"Your young friend is suffering from considerable shock," he said, "and has evidently also taken a severe cold; but with care and nursing she will in all probability soon get relief—that is, if the strain from which she is suffering is taken off her mind."

"Oh, I think I can manage that," answered Kitty, nodding to the doctor in a very bright and frank way. Her dark-blue eyes were shining like stars; the color in her cheeks, the set of her beautiful head on her lovely neck, the very arrangement of her clothes fairly betwiched that good man. He had seldom seen such sparkling eyes nor such a beautiful dimpled mouth. Kitty's manner completely won Dr. Marchand over to her side, as it had already done the good people at the hotel.

After getting innumerable directions from the doctor, she went down-stairs to consult with her landlady.

"Now, Mrs. Stacey," she said, "I must buy lots of things, I wonder if you can help me. I have telegraphed to father to come her; but until he does I have only this much;" here she opened her purse and tumbled the contents on to the landlady's palm.

Mrs. Stacey started back in some astonishment. Really this was a very fascinating young lady; but she had never met anybody quite so—so out of the common.

"You can reckon it up if you like," said Kitty; "you will see that it does not come to two pounds. Now, do you know of a shop that would trust me—give me credit, I mean—for some things?"

"What sort of things, miss?"

"Oh, clothes, and a couple of trunks. You see we are not respectable without trunks, are we?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Malone, you are."

"But do you know of such a shop? Please think very hard, Mrs. Stacey."

"Williamson's round the corner will oblige you to any extent, miss, if you mention my name."

"Then I'll go there immediately. Thank you; how very nice you are!" said Kitty.

"Of course I ought not to be nice to you, miss, for it ain't right—no, that it ain't—to encourage runaways."

"When you know our story you will be quite glad you encouraged us," laughted Kitty.

"Then perhaps you'll confide in me, miss."

Kitty colored and thought for a moment.

"I think father must know it first," she said. "And now I must rush away to get the things that poor Elma requires."

During the course of that day it would scarcely be said that Kitty Malone was without luggage; for two new trunks presently made their appearance, full to the brim with all sorts of dainty clothing both for Elma and herself.

"Elma," she cried, dancing into the sick-room, "I have got two of the most charming hats you ever laid eyes on. Mine is sweetly becoming to me, and I am sure yours will suit you equally well; they are both big white leghorns, with great bunches of black feathers in front. Won't they look sweet with our new muslin dresses? Mine is pink, but I, thought blue would suit you best. I expect dad to-morrow evening at the latest; and I am going to meet him at the station in my new hat and dress. There will be no doubt about his forgiving me when he sees me in them."

Just then there was a tap at the door, and Kitty, rushing to open it, found a telegram awaiting her. She tore it open and read the following words:

"Starting from Dublin by the night-boat. Will be with you to-morrow.—DENNIS MALONE."

"There, didn't I say he was a darling—the best, best darling in the world?" cried the excited girl. "Oh, won't he have a *caed mille afaltha;* won't he? Elma, I am almost beside myself."

"I don't know what you are talking about," said Elma. "What do you mean by those queer words?"

"*Caed mille afaltha?* Oh, they are the Irish for a hundred thousand welcomes. We put them over our arches and everything when people are coming home. Oh, they don't speak a half nor a quarter of what our hearts are full of. Oh father, father, the joy—the joy your poor little Kitty feels at the thought of seeing your darling face again!"

That night again Kitty lay awake, although Elma slept. Strange thoughts, strange and new, were coursing through the young girl's brain. Everything had been a failure, and yet she felt bright and happy and like her old self once more.

"It is the thought of seeing father," she said to herself. "I was never fit for England. England and its ways will never suit me, never, never; but when I see father I shall be all right. Oh, to think that he is really coming, and that Laurie is saved! I must, of course, tell father everything; but he won't be angry with Laurie when I tell him the story in my own way."

Accordingly early the next morning Kitty dressed herself in the fascinating leghorn hat and slipped on the pink muslin dress, and, with a bunch of roses at her belt, sallied forth to the railway station. She soon found the right platform, and paced up and down in a fever of impatience waiting for the train. As she was doing so, flaunting her pretty little person in a somewhat aggressive way and causing some prim-looking ladies to gaze at her with anything but approval, a hand was laid on her rm, and turning she saw, to her amazement, the extremely indignant faces of Miss Sherrard and Miss Worrick.

"Well, Kitty, after this!" said Miss Sherrard.

"Oh, please don't scold me just now!" said Kitty, with a little gasp; "wait until he comes."

"Until who comes?"

"Father. I am expecting him by this train."

"I am relieved at that, said Miss Sherrard. You may tell him everything; but please let me tell him my story first. You must, you shall; I insist."

The girl's eyes were flashing; she was trembling all over. Just when her happiness seemed to be at its height, for Miss Sherrard and Miss Worrick to appear!

"Oh, and there's the train!" she cried. "He will be here in a minute; let me see him first. Oh, the train is stopping, and there he is; I see him at the very end; there he is with his white hair and—let me go, let me go!"

She rushed from Miss Sherrard's retaining arm and flew up the platform, and a moment later the owner of the pink dress and leghorn hat was being clasped tightly, tightly to the breast of the magnificent-looking old gentleman, almost a king in his way, who had suddenly stepped on to the platform.

"Father, you'll protect me—they have come, they have followed me. You will let me tell you my story first? Father! father! oh, feel how my heart is beating!"

"Why, Kitty, asthore; Kitty, Kitty, my own. What is it, Kit? I say, Kit, what is wrong?"

"Nothing, nothing now that you have come; but let me tell you my story first."

"Your story first—why, of course, Kit."

"They are there; speak to them; tell them you will see them afterward. We are staying at the Sign of the Red Doe; tell them that you will see me first and then you will see them."

"Introduce me to them, Kitty, and calm yourself. Come, Kitty, come."

"Yes, father, yes; it is all right."

Kitty's terrible excitement subsided; leaning on her father's arm, she approached the platform where Miss Sherrard and Miss Worrick, both looking rather confused, were standing.

"This is my father, Miss Sherrard," said Kitty, introducing Dennis Malone, who took off his hat with a grand sweep.

"I am relieved to see you," began Miss Sherrard.

"Pardon me one moment, madam," said Malone; "but Kitty here would like to tell me her story first. You are her school-mistress, the lady with whom I have had the pleasure of corresponding?"

"I am, and I have a very, very painful tale to tell you."

"You shall tell me your story afterward."

Here the owner of Castle Malone caught sight of Miss Worrick, and gave her a bow even more deferential than he had bestowed upon the head-mistress.

"I am sorry to put you off even for a few moments, ladies,"

he said; "but you see this little girl, she—she must come first. However badly she has behaved, she—she is my only girl, you understand, and I—I must hear her story first. Will you meet us both within an hour at the Sign of the Red Doe? Then everything can be explained."

"I wonder if that dreadful girl is to go unpunished in the end," said Miss Worrick to Miss Sherrard, as they both slowly went to the nearest hotel to wait until the time arranged to meet Kitty and her father at the Sign of the Red Doe."

"It seems like it," said Miss Sherrard. "But what a splendid old man! Perhaps after all it may be the best thing for Kitty Malone, not to punish her, Miss Worrick."

"Oh, Miss Sherrard! I cannot approve of your very lax opinions. Surely punishment for such terrible wrong-doing——"

"Yes, she behaved badly, but not so badly as Elma. I think we must wait to hear the whole story explained; at present we are more or less in the dark."

"And now, Kit, what is it?" said the squire, when he and his daughter were ensconced in the little sitting-room at the Sign of the Red Doe.

"Do you mind if I give you one of my real big hugs first?" said Kitty.

"To be sure not, alanna—oh, acushla macree! it is like flowers in May to see you again."

"There! I am better now," said Kitty, after she had bestowed one of her most violent hugs upon her father. "Let me sit on your knee and I will tell you everything."

At the best it was a sad story, a story full of wrong-doing, full of impulse, full of passion; and although Kitty tried hard to make Elma's part of it as light as possible, the squire's eyes blazed and a thundering note came into his voice as he listened.

"That's a bad girl, Kitty," he cried; "and you ought to have nothing to do with her."

"But that's exactly it, father—that's what I am coming to. If you won't let me have anything to do with Elma, why—why, you must punish me terribly. I want you to let me—to let me make Elma my real friend."

"That sort of girl your friend? Not if I know it," said the squire.

"But, please, father, do let me plead for her. I have done her injury, and she—she has never had advantages like the rest of us."

Then Kitty began to coax, and few, very few people could coax like this Irish girl. Not only with her voice, but with her eyes, with a smile here and a frown there, she set herself to bring old Squire Malone to her way of thinking. And as always from the time she was a tiny child she had been able to twist this old lion round her little finger, so she twisted him now.

"You have got to do it, father," she said at last. "You have got to forgive Laurie, and you have got to forgive Elma, and——"

"Bless the boy, it was just like his recklessness. Why didn't he come and tell me? He wasn't afraid of his old father, was he?"

"Well, father, you know you are very fierce you you like."

"Tut! tut! Kitty, don't you begin to scold."

"No, I won't—not if you yield to me. Full and free forgiveness for the whole three of us; for your Kit——"

"Bless you, child, I have forgiven you already."

"Aye, didn't I know it—didn't I say he was a dear old thing? Now, Laurie—you won't say a word to him?"

"I'll give him a right good scolding."

"Why, then, dad, your scolding never did anybody any harm; your bark is worse than your bite, you know; but there will be no school in England for him, that's what I mean."

"Well, it doesn't seem to have succeeded with you, asthore."

"No more it did. Why, it was breaking the heart in me entirely."

"So you want to come back with me again?"

"That I do, and never, never be a polished lady with manners to the longest day of my life."

"You want to be Wild Kitty still?"

"Wild, wild, the wildest of Kittys to the end of the chapter."

"And what will your aunts say?"

"Never mind; what you say is the important thing."

"It shall be as you please, Kit. I am sure I have missed you sore, very sore."

"And now, what about Elma?"

"Yes; what do you want me to do for her?"

"I want her to come back with me to Castle Malone for the rest of the summer."

"Oh, heart alive! child; but I don't think I could take to that sort of girl."

"Yes, you will, if I take to her. Now, dad, must I begin it all over again?"

"No, no; anything to please you, Kit."

"And at the end of the summer, as you have plenty of money, and as I am sure she has repented most bitterly, will you send her to Girton?"

"Oh, come, come; I make no promises."

"But I know it is all right, and I am going to rush up to her and tell her everything. Oh, and here come Miss Sherrard and Miss Worrick. You shall see them without me."

"I declare, upon my word, Kitty, you are the most extraordinary creature. How am I to face the good ladies?"

"Here they are, father. Please, Miss Sherrard, come in; father will see you, and Miss Worrick too."

Kitty flung open the door, and the head-mistress of Middleton School and her subordinate found it closed behind them. They had a short interview with Squire Malone—very short. It ended by Miss Sherrard and the squire shaking hands most heartily.

"You did your best for her, and I am awfully obliged to you," said the squire. "But, after all, she is too wild for England; she had better stay in her own land."

"I believe you are right," said Miss Sherrard.

THE END.

The silver cord in twain is snapped,
  The golden bowl is broken,
The mortal mold in darkness wrapped,
  The words funereal spoken;
The tomb is built, or the rock is cleft,
  Or delved is the grassy clod.
And what for mourning man is left?
  O what is left—but God!

The tears are shed that mourned the dead,
  The flowers they wore are faded;
The twilight dun hath veiled the sun,
  And hope's sweet dreamings shaded:
And the thoughts of joy that were planted deep
  From our heart of hearts are riven;
And what is left us when we weep?
  O what is left—but heaven!

BOWRING.

Won In The Ninth

A STORY ABOUT BASEBALL

By "CHRISTY" MATHEWSON

(FAMOUS PITCHER OF THE NEW YORK NATIONAL LEAGUE BASEBALL TEAM)

(Copyrighted, 1910, by the R. J. Bodmer Co.

The characters are college boys in everything but their ability to play baseball. Each represents one of the leading players who are now playing in the American and National Leagues with names slightly changed, but the reader will soon discover that he is reading the early exploits of one of his baseball favorites.

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